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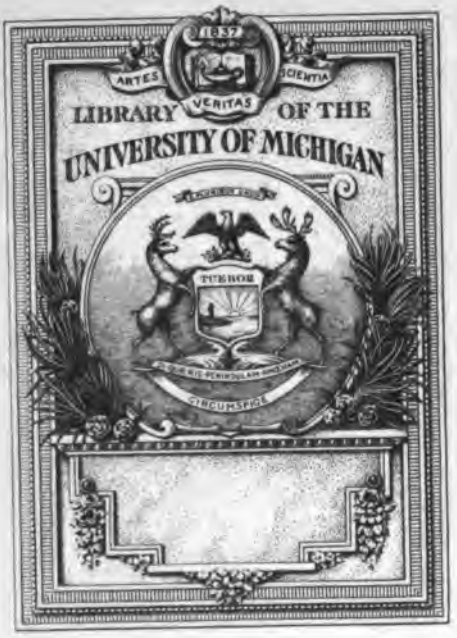

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THE CAMPAIGN OF TRAFALGAR

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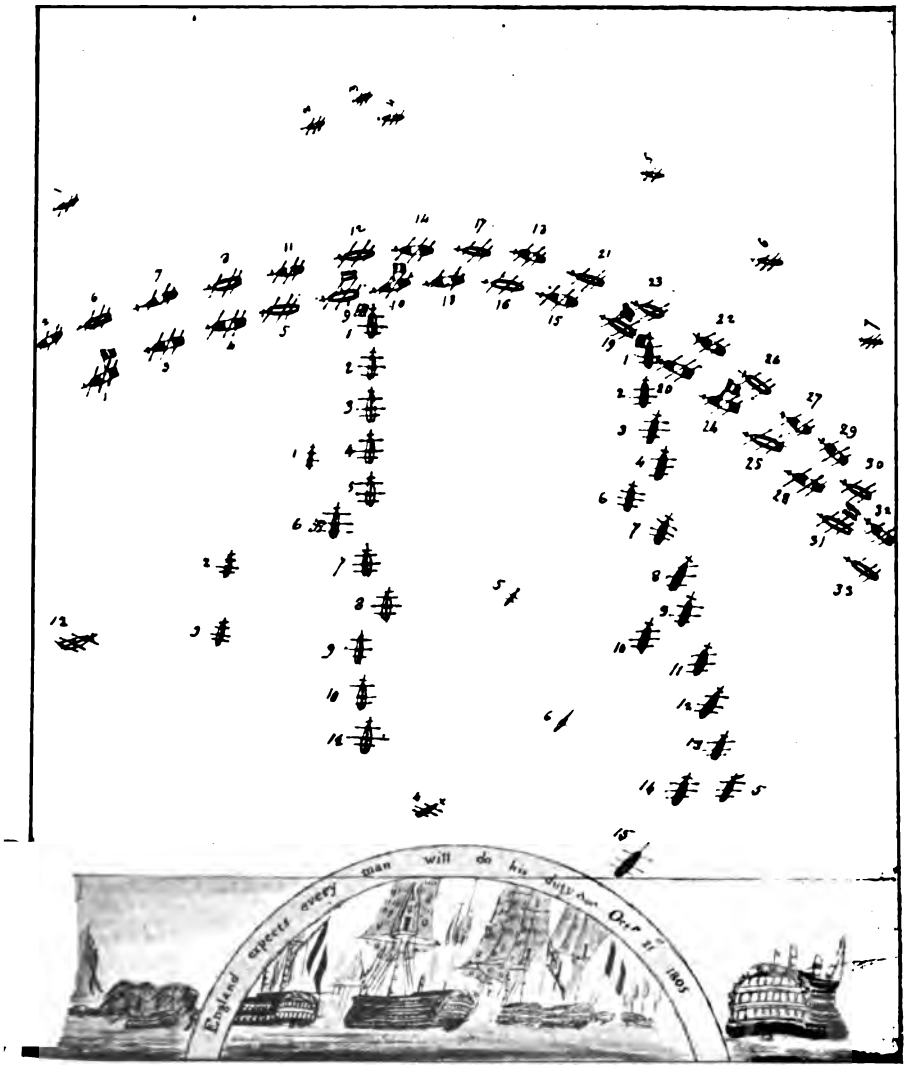

THE ATTACK AT TRAFALGAR

From a contemporary manuscript plan in the possession of the Author

EXPLANATION OF THE PLAN

BRITISH

Weather Division

1. Victory 100.
2. Témeraire 98.
3. Neptune 98.
4. Conqueror 74.
5. Leviathan 74.
6. Britannia 100.
7. Orion 74.
8. Ajax 74.
9. Spartiate 74.
10. Agamemnon 64.
11. Minotaur 74.
12. Africa 64.

Lee Division

1. Royal Sovereign 100.
2. Mars 74.
3. Belleisle 74.
4. Tonnant 80.
5. Colossus 74.
6. Achille 74.
7. Bellerophon 74.
8. Revenge 74.
9. Defiance 74.
10. Thunderer 74.
11. Defence 74.
12. Swiftsure 74.
13. Polyphemus 64.
14. Dreadnought 98.
15. Prince 98.

Cruisers

1. Euryalus 36.
2. Phœbe 36.
3. Sirius 32.
4. Naiad 38.
5. Pickle 10.
6. Entreprenant 10.

THE CAMPAIGN OF TRAFALGAR

BY
JULIAN S. CORBETT, LL.M.

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. I

WITH CHARTS AND DIAGRAMS

NEW EDITION

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TO

MY WIFE

ON HER BIRTHDAY

OCTOBER 21

Hist.-European
Soth.
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2 vol.

PREFACE

In the most recent bibliography of the Waterloo campaign, that prepared by Professor Oman for the *Cambridge Modern History*, there appear little short of a score of works entirely devoted to its elucidation. For the Trafalgar campaign our English language cannot boast a single one. Of the battle itself there are studies innumerable, serious, fanciful, and anecdotic; but the fact remains that, though its centenary is past and gone, no British pen has ever been set to the task of producing, from the vast store of material that exists, anything like a reasoned Staff account of the crowning chapter in the history of naval warfare. We have, it is true, Mr. Newbolt's delightful volume, *The Year of Trafalgar;* but that, although it contains the best study of the battle that has yet appeared, makes no pretence of dealing exhaustively with the policy and operations which led to it. The truth is that for all the spade work that has been devoted to it in recent years by Sir John K. Laughton, Mr. Leyland, and others, the subject has been left, so far as the Service and the public are concerned, in the same comparative darkness that enshrouds the bulk of our naval history. Nelson's share of the work has received ample justice. Indeed the campaign has scarcely ever been approached except from his standpoint. And yet till nearly the end his share was comparatively small. Until in the last month of his life, when he resumed command of the restored Mediterranean station, he had a bare dozen of the line and a score or so of cruisers under his flag, while during the year there were in commission and reserve well over a hundred of the line and four hundred cruisers.

Nor is this all. The military side of the campaign has been left in even greater obscurity than the naval. In the course of the year, besides the troops in the East and West Indies, we had something like 50,000 men engaged in active oversea operations. Only a fraction of these touched Nelson, and where they did their deflecting influence on his strategy has been almost entirely ignored. Indeed it is not too much to say that the controlling fact that the campaign of 1805 was a combined campaign and not merely naval, has never been given its due importance. Still less has it been realised that it was essentially an offensive campaign, and not merely a campaign of defence against invasion. The failure to grasp these cardinal facts has clouded even Nelson's action and exposed him to criticism which he did not deserve. How much more then has it clouded the rest!

It is not that a minute study of the campaign detracts in the least from Nelson's greatness. High as such a study lifts the reputation of his colleagues, Nelson still remains the greatest of admirals. The fascination of his dazzling personality still dominates the judgment, and it is only by a severe and persistent effort of resistance that we can hope to see things in their true proportion and real meaning. If we would read the lesson aright not only must we keep Nelson's part in due subordination, but we must also continually forswear the calling of the sea and closet ourselves with Pitt and Melville, with Barham and Castlereagh. It is with them alone we may watch the inward springs at work, by which the fleets at sea were really controlled, and mark the flow of intelligence from spies and cruisers and embassies that set them in motion or stayed their action.

For such a detailed study, as most of our military campaigns but not one of our naval have received, the time has been ripened by the publication of a large proportion of the essential documents. For the diplomatic influences, which

in this, as in most campaigns, provides the master-key, we have Mr. Holland Rose's *Select Despatches relating to the Third Coalition against France*, 1804–5, edited for the Royal Historical Society, though, as the editor unfortunately omitted to note the dates on which the despatches were received, their connection with naval and military instructions has been impossible to trace without collation with the originals. To this collection must be added, besides the well-known correspondence of Napoleon and Talleyrand, Mons. P. Coquelle's *Napoleon et Angleterre* (1803–13), and Mons. Charles Auriol's *La France, l'Angleterre et Naples* (1803–6), both invaluable works.

For the naval side we have Mr. Leyland's *Despatches and Letters relating to the Blockade of Brest*, 1803–5, edited for the Navy Records Society, and the *Cornwallis Papers*, recently published by the Historical MSS. Commission from the collection of Mr. Cornwallis Wykeham-Martin (*Various Collections*, vol. vi. 1909). But for the most valuable published material by far we must acknowledge our debt with humility, if not with shame, to the French War Office. The monumental works of Colonel Édouard Desbrière, entitled, *Projets et tentatives de débarquement aux Îles Britanniques* (1793–1805) and *La Campaign Maritime de Trafalgar*, published under the direction of the Section Historique de l'État-major de l'Armee, contain the first attempt to form a real Staff history of the campaign, and although they make no pretence of dealing adequately with the unpublished English material, they place us for the first time in a position to see the campaign as it really was. My debt to these volumes, increased as it is by Colonel Desbrière's courtesy in personally elucidating points that were obscured by faulty transcripts, is almost beyond recognition. A similar work from the Spanish side is still in progress in the *Revista de Marina* by General Galiano, a lineal descendant of a Trafalgar hero. It is useful in supplementing Colonel Des-

brière's volumes, although most of the important Spanish documents were generously communicated to the French Staff by General Galiano for Colonel Desbrière's use.

Amongst manuscript sources only recently accessible, we have the *Pitt Papers*, deposited at the Public Record Office, and, still more valuable, the *Barham Papers*, which have been entrusted for publication to the Navy Records Society. To these latter I have been permitted access, and have received invaluable assistance in examining them from the editor, Sir John Laughton.

The labour of working through the mass of Ships' Logs and Journals, the Admirals' and Captains' letters, and the other rich material in the Admiralty Archives, and of subsequently reducing it to narrative and critical form, has necessarily been great; but in attempting the formidable task my path has been smoothed by many ready helpers. My thanks are especially due to Captain Hudleston, R.N., for placing at my disposal his researches into the system of naval defence in home waters; to Mr. Perrin, the Admiralty Librarian, for help in every direction, and particularly in preparing the Schedule of Signals recorded as having been made at the battle of Trafalgar; and to Lieutenant Keate, R.N., for assistance in preparing the track charts from the Logs.

Of these charts, which have now been constructed for the first time, and which are the necessary basis of all strategical criticism, it must be explained that they should not be taken as absolutely correct. Except where otherwise indicated the tracks are simply plotted between noon positions, and owing to the uncertainty of longitude observations, even these positions are sometimes only approximate. This is especially the case with the smaller cruisers, whose neglected movements are not infrequently vital to a correct view of fleet operations, such as Orde's retreat from Cadiz and Nelson's final decision to chase to the West Indies. In the important case, for instance,

of the *Iris*, which observed Villeneuve's final movement from Ferrol, no one on board seems to have been able to work out a longitude at all. At least none are entered in her master's log, and in running down from Ushant she made Cape Peñas instead of Ortegal, nearly a hundred miles to the westward.

In plotting the French tracks the difficulty of reaching precision has been even greater. They are primarily based on the charts given by Colonel Desbrière, but unfortunately these charts are not quite worthy of the rest of the work. They have required careful correction from the positions and courses recorded in the documents themselves. Sometimes these, too, are obviously false, especially in the case of Villeneuve's retreat from Ferrol and Cadiz; and in these cases the track shown is that actually observed and reported by our cruisers. When, as occurs in the most doubtful cases, two or more of such cruisers working independently give coinciding observations, the positions and course reported are taken as correct.

It is hoped that the movements and instructions of these cruisers, and indeed the whole system of scouting and intelligence, will be found an interesting feature of the book. Hitherto, owing to the unfortunate precedent set by James, cruiser work has usually been divorced from the major operations to which it belongs organically, and we have known little about it beyond the frigate actions that were fought. To naval officers, and indeed to all serious students of naval warfare, history so written must have a flavour of unreality that is little short of repellent. What they require is a co-ordinated account of the movements of all classes of ships engaged in each operation, and a clear knowledge of the instructions and intelligence under which it was carried out. In short, if Naval History is to establish itself as a matter of real instructional interest, students must be able to find in accounts of the old campaigns at least an indication of what they would look for in a report on manœuvres to-day.

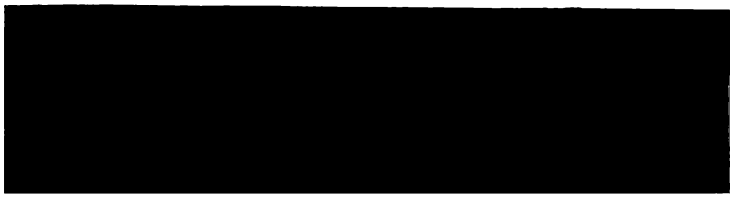
No one can approach our Naval History from this point of view, even in the tentative and imperfect manner that has been attempted in the following pages, without feeling how defective is the bulk of what we now possess. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the whole requires re-writing on Staff lines. But it is unlikely that so large and technical a task can ever be done adequately except by an Historical Section at the Admiralty. The need for such a Section is crying. Buried in our Naval Archives is a mass of lore, a body of matured tradition, such as no other country in the world possesses; but it lies dormant and forgotten, a wasted power of incalculable force, that might be ours behind the guns and ours alone. But to re-awaken that tradition, to make it a living thing, as it was to Barham and Cornwallis and Nelson, to render it once more the active force that gave them nerve and initiative, and that certainty of touch which seems now almost miraculous, is beyond the reach of individual effort. It needs, no less than the most technical and material parts of the naval art, a laboratory where civilian and naval experts can work side by side to supply each other's defects and ripen each other's ideas.

It has indeed been suggested that a Professorship of Naval History at a University might supply the need. But however such a chair may succeed for Military History or for forming a sound national opinion, for the practical needs of the Service it seems foredoomed to failure. What is of the sea must breathe the breath of the sea. Without it it will pine in academical speculation. In salt water the old naval tradition was born, and by salt water alone can it be nourished. Sever the work of revival from the Admiralty and you sever it from the well-spring of that intangible spirit which is our peculiar asset. It is ours alone if we choose to use it. The most perfect organisation, the most scholarly research, the most elaborate technical science, cannot supply its place. It is

the product of centuries of naval warfare, and it is w
have the centuries behind us. The atmosphere they
engendered is the soul of the matter, and nowhere out
mate touch with the fleet can its inspiration be assured.

Some day, it may be hoped, the truth may be re
Some day, perhaps, we shall recognise the value of the
by which alone we may bend again the bow of Od
and then an Historical Section will seem as indispens
national asset as an experimental tank or a laborato
high explosives.

J. S



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THE CAMPAIGN OF TRAFALGAR

CHAPTER I

PITT'S WAR POLICY

WHEN, in May 1804, Pitt returned to power it was with a determination to conduct the lingering war on the grand scale of his father and by his father's strenuous methods. Treasured among his papers of the time is an eloquent apostrophe urging him to rise up and take the place that had been held by William the Third, by Marlborough, and by his father: to set himself, as they had done, at the head of Europe against Europe's great oppressor, to stir the faint hearts of the Powers into united effort, and to remove from England the reproach that she had not produced a war minister since the great days of Chatham.

The people, realising how the country's strength had grown with the war, were looking to him to give expression to their rising spirit; to teach them not only how to protect themselves from invasion, but how in the consciousness of their strength to strike down their arch-enemy as they had been wont to do in old days. In this spirit he gathered up the reins, and began at once to lay his widespread plans to give the war a new and more worthy presence.

Ever since we had broken the Peace of Amiens, our attitude, in effect, had been one of defence. Napoleon's unblushing contempt for his diplomatic engagements, and his unconcealed belief that by sheer truculence he could force us out of the European system altogether, had driven Addington's peace-loving Government to declare war.[1] To wage it was another thing, and it quickly proved to be beyond their capacity. From the first they were dominated by the elaborate threat of invasion by which Napoleon seized the initiative. Seeing how weak was the army, it paralysed all hope of offensive action in Europe, and our confident enemy could make merry over a country that went to war to show that it could defend itself.

Such offensive operations as were within their resources had been purely maritime—directed against the sea-borne trade of France and her minor colonial possessions. At the outbreak of hostilities our military strength in the West Indies was considerable, for the garrisons which had been in occupation of the French islands captured in the late war had not yet returned. These were well employed in retaking St. Lucia, which had come from long experience to be regarded as the key of the naval position in the Leeward Islands. So high, indeed, did it stand as a naval position that the question of its retrocession had almost wrecked the peace which ended the Seven Years' War. But, not content with this legitimate opening, the Government, in spite of the bitter lessons of the last war, proceeded to occupy Tobago and the four Dutch settlements of Demerara, Essequibo, Berbice, and Surinam. All these sickly stations required garrisons, and the result was to demobilise a serious proportion of our slender military force, and still

[1] For the recent French recognition of Napoleon's responsibility for the renewal of the war, see P. Coquelle, *Napoleon and England*, translated by G. D. Knox. 1904.

further to reduce the possibility of a more active policy a home.[1]

For these adventures Addington and his friends ar now blamed without mercy, but candour and a reasonabl knowledge of the political conditions should temper th habitual attitude of superiority which their critics are won to adopt. To begin with, we had in any case no hope c being able to use our army in Europe with effect single handed, and at that time we were single-handed. And i the second place, the opening moves against the Dutc colonies were, in fact, a direct blow at the object we had i view. The real cause of the war, as is now admitted o both sides, was Napoleon's shameless behaviour to th United Provinces in breach of the Treaty of Lunéville Before the ink was well dry he had reduced Holland to th condition of a subject-ally of France. His similar behaviou in Northern Italy and Switzerland intensified the resentmen his breach of faith aroused; but the virtual annexation o Holland was what made a renewal of the war inevitable It touched our traditional policy to the quick. The menac to our position in the Narrow Seas was one we had neve been willing to endure. Now our reply was a refusal t evacuate Malta as provided by the Treaty of Amiens, an so the war broke out again. It was therefore a perfectl logical opening to strike at the Dutch colonies. It was blow that could be dealt rapidly, and was well calculate to teach any man but Napoleon the lesson he could neve learn. It told him plainly that, if France could find n room for England in the councils of Europe, there would b no room for a French empire beyond the seas.

But in political effect the West Indian conquests prove of no avail, and in the actual war they counted for nothin except in one not unimportant direction. The capture islands were a hotbed of privateering, and privateering wa

[1] Fortescue, *County Lieutenants and the Army*, p. 10.

always the chief danger to our sea-borne commerce. Long experience had shown that it could not be dealt with effectually by pelagic operations alone. Addington's policy, therefore, has at least the justification not only of having dealt a direct blow at French commerce, and therefore at her finance, but also of having adopted the most effectual method of protecting our own. And, be it remembered, it was the retention of our financial position that eventually enabled us to beat Napoleon down; it was our sole hope of securing allies: and furthermore our only possible means of offence for the moment was against French sea-borne commerce. It was a form of attack particularly embarrassing to a ruler like Napoleon, whose chief aim in consenting to a peace had been to restore his finances and his fleet. It is therefore perhaps too narrow a judgment to condemn the West Indian operations out of hand merely because they seem to sin against the principle of concentration, and were a form of war which of itself could never decide the issue. Where a maritime empire is concerned caution is required in applying the simple formulæ of continental strategists. Oceanic and continental war differ widely in some of their cardinal conditions. It is not enough to apply the maxims of the one crudely to the intricacies of the other, and Addington's detractors should at least indicate in what direction the troops employed could have been used more profitably than in strengthening the position of the navy and lightening its burden.[1]

Every one was quick to see that something more drastic must be done in the future, and Pitt rose to power on a wave of opinion that the hour for a change was at hand. The military forces at home had considerably increased. We began the war with a home army of little more than

[1] Colonel Henderson, when head of the Staff College, used to lay down the rule that "the first duty of the British army was to assist the navy in getting command of the sea." And in this case the assistance was real and enduring.

50,000 regulars; by the summer of 1804 we had 87,000, besides 80,000 militia and 343,000 volunteers, or over half a million men. Pitt's first measures were directed to increasing the regular force still further; but even so, offence against such a power as Napoleon's was impossible single-handed. Only in alliance with the great military states of the continent could his father's methods be used, and simultaneously with the ripening of our striking energy alliances came in view.

It is here—in the negotiations and preliminary action for securing these alliances—that we find the key of the Trafalgar campaign. To treat it as the mere expression of the old policy of defence against invasion, which Pitt had resolved to abandon, is to seek for its meaning in vain. Yet it is on these lines the bulk of criticism runs, with the result that the real teaching has been almost entirely buried in a mass of erroneous strategical deduction. Through all this accumulation we must dig if we would recover the most precious treasure that naval experience has ever fashioned, and the first step towards recovery is to seek a simple understanding of Pitt's policy of military alliances. When Napoleon was trying to browbeat Addington's Government over their refusal to evacuate Malta—trampling on every decency of international comity—he had openly boasted that he had left England without an ally in Europe. She seemed to him helpless. In his almost crazy self-confidence he believed he could prevent the old causes producing the old effects and tread underfoot the fundamental laws which had given England her place in international politics ever since the European system had begun. Ignored by him, these laws began to reassert themselves almost immediately, and even before Pitt came back to power Russia had already made advances. Convinced by Napoleon's action in Holland, Italy, and Switzerland that he had not abandoned for a moment his ambitious dreams

of European empire, she was bent on forming a defensive league to thwart his design.

It was where the danger touched her most nearly that England and England alone could give effective help. Napoleon was known to be cherishing a purpose to overrun the Ottoman Empire by way of Albania and Greece, and for this reason Russia had maintained a small squadron and a military outpost in Corfu and the Ionian Islands. We were as deeply concerned in Napoleon's design. For us Turkey was but a step on the path to India, and for this reason also we had clung, in the face of the Treaty of Amiens, to our hold on Malta. There was, moreover, another common interest at stake. It lay in Southern Italy, which Napoleon was openly threatening, and which he seemed bent on making the starting-point of his Near Eastern enterprises. Russia had taken the Kingdom of Naples under her special protection; and by a tradition as old as Cromwell, the denying of the Two Sicilies to France had become as much a dominant note of our maritime policy as the integrity of the Low Countries had been from time immemorial.

Naturally, then, the Russian overtures were well received in London, and just as Pitt came to power Woronzow, the Czar's ambassador, was able to say that a large Russian force from the Black Sea would be sent to the Ionian Islands or to Italy as circumstances might require, and that the Czar hoped his Britannic Majesty would order a corps of troops to be kept at Malta in readiness to act in conjunction with those of Russia.[1]

It is here we pick up the thread that led directly to the decision at Trafalgar. Slender as it proved to be, it is the only sure guide through the labyrinth of the campaign. The splendour and tragedy of the great day of reckoning

[1] J. Holland Rose, *Select Despatches relating to the Third Coalition* (Royal Historical Society, 1904), p. ix.

had long cast this guiding line into obscurity. Yet, so far as human judgment can tell, without the entanglement it weaved about Napoleon the most famous naval battle in history would not have been fought. It was an effort to cut himself free from it that cost Napoleon his fleet; and unless we keep it securely between our fingers we must wander in error through the thronging movements of the year and never reach their real meaning. Let us trace the spinning of it till its strands were securely twined.

The idea that was in the Czar's mind was to form, with British assistance and above all with British subsidies, a great defensive league with Austria, Prussia, and Sweden. Whether all or any of those Powers could be induced to join was doubtful. The formation of the league must at least take much time, during which Napoleon might greatly strengthen his position. But in any event Russia and England could act together at once to bar his advance in the Mediterranean. Under the Treaty of Amiens he had agreed to evacuate the Neapolitan ports of Otranto and Taranto, in the south of Italy. But he had now reoccupied them, and from these points was not only threatening the Levant across the Adriatic, but was in a position to strike a sudden blow through Calabria at Sicily. It was vital to the situation that any such catastrophe should be prevented; and thus the idea of British troops in the Mediterranean became as it were the symbol and test of Pitt's purpose. When he pressed that the league should be offensive and for immediate action, the Czar at once reminded him that with respect to reinforcing our garrisons in the Mediterranean and assembling a corps of troops to act in Italy, Pitt had announced a delay of two or three months, not having as yet sufficient troops available for an expeditionary force. Admiral Sir John B. Warren, who was then our ambassador in Russia, immediately replied that a large part of the garrisons of Malta and Gibraltar could

be spared at once, and that the remainder of the British troops would soon follow if the Czar would only propose to enter into a treaty to unite the Powers into an offensive and defensive alliance.[1] Within a month Russia had decided to send an ultimatum to Napoleon demanding the evacuation of Apulia, the arrangement of the affairs of Italy, compensation to the King of Sardinia for what had been taken from him, and the evacuation of North Germany. If there were no satisfactory answer in twenty-four hours his ambassador was to leave Paris.[2] Following on this resolute step Pitt sent out Lord Granville Leveson-Gower to replace Warren in order to negotiate a regular alliance, and the special instructions he carried were first to clear up a misunderstanding that had arisen as to the British view of Russian action in Italy. Pitt wished the Russians at once to seize the passes leading into Calabria from Taranto. The Czar thought he was being urged to drive the French out of the Kingdom of Naples single-handed, and Leveson-Gower was to assure him England knew that was impossible till Austria joined. But if he attempted the lesser operation two thousand troops from Malta were ready to assist at once. The immediate British object was solely to prevent France seizing Sicily by a *coup de main* through Calabria. For without Sicily as a base of supply the position of our fleet in the Mediterranean would be very difficult to maintain.

The words in which these instructions were conveyed to Leveson-Gower by Lord Harrowby, who was then Pitt's Foreign Secretary, are worth recording and remembering, for in them lies the explanation of much naval strategy, and in particular do they afford the key of Nelson's attitude to the Neapolitan question, and the complex naval problem

[1] Warren to Harrowby, July 24, 1804: Rose, *Select Despatches relating to the Third Coalition* (Royal Historical Society, 3rd Series), vol. vii. p. 25.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 32, August 14.

which it involved. The actual situation at our point of contact with Russia turned upon the command of the Mediterranean, and that depended on Nelson's power of controlling the Toulon fleet—not necessarily of blockading it, but, as he preferred to say, on "holding it in check" till it could be met and destroyed. "It would become doubtful," wrote Harrowby, in directing Gower to insist on the importance of immediate action, "whether the blockade of Toulon could be maintained as effectually as it has been hitherto [if Sicily were lost]; and in case the French fleet should escape from that port and be able to detach any considerable force to the Adriatic, the Russian Government would do well to consider the danger to which their own squadron in those seas would be exposed, and the opportunity which would be afforded to the French of making a successful attack upon Albania and the Morea."

These were exactly Nelson's ideas. He was not of course blockading Toulon closely, but endeavouring to watch the Toulon fleet in such a way that if it attempted to get to the eastward and endanger what it was his special province to defend, it would certainly be brought to action. For this purpose Gibraltar and Malta were of little use. As bases they were wrongly placed. What was wanted was one that would enable him to retain continuously the only position that was interior to either line of operation the French might adopt, whether westwards out of the Straits, or eastwards against Naples and the Levant. It was for this reason he always insisted that Sardinia and Sicily were the keys of the strategical situation.

"You will receive," Harrowby's instructions to Gower went on, "the assurances which were given by me to Count Woronzow, that exertions would be made to increase the disposal force of the garrison of Malta: and you may express a hope that a reinforcement of 5000 or 6000 men will have reached it in a few months. These troops will

have eventual orders to act in the defence of Sicily, of Calabria, or of Turkey, as circumstances may require . . . but it seems necessary that their attention should be specially directed to the defence . . . of Sicily."[1]

The despatch ended accordingly with a renewed suggestion that Russian troops should be sent at once to co-operate with the Calabrians, whom we had been supplying with arms, and to assist them to hold the passes while the British troops from Malta occupied Messina.

The new ambassador also received special instructions to press for the re-establishment of the Sardinian Kingdom in Piedmont as a barrier to France in the intended settlement of Italy. The aggrandisement of the House of Savoy, as a means of preserving the balance of power in the Mediterranean, had become a constant of British policy. The military importance of the Sardinian Kingdom was recognised universally, but in British eyes its naval value was no less; and ever since Nelson had been in command in the Mediterranean he had been pressing the strategical value of Sardinia on the Government. So soon as the new administration was fairly in the saddle he had received orders frankly endorsing his ideas, and on the very day Leveson-Gower's instructions were signed, Nelson was acknowledging the Government's directions to have a special care for Sardinia.[2]

The British proposal, which was based on separate lines of operation, did not commend itself to the Russian Government. They wanted a much larger force and joint operations in Italy itself under one commander: but in view of Napoleon's threat from Boulogne, Leveson-Gower had to say

[1] Harrowby to Gower, October 10: Rose, *Third Coalition*, p. 45.

[2] Nelson to Marsden, October 10, 1804: Nicolas, vi. 227. See also Earl Camden to Nelson, August 29 (*Ibid.*, p. 228*n*), informing him that the threat of invasion will prevent their sending an expedition to the Mediterranean before winter, and that meanwhile they are despatching an officer to Sardinia to report.

that an increase of the British force in the Mediterranean was as yet impossible.[1] Meanwhile Pitt was devoting himself with all his energy to increasing our disposal force, and was still doing his utmost not only to strengthen the regular army, but to take measures to render the home defence secure in the hands of the territorial forces.[2] Russia, after some demur, admitted the strength of the British arguments, and on the promise of 8000 troops in a month or two, she consented to co-operate at once from Corfu with 20,000, provided the whole force was commanded by a Russian General, and that England furnished the necessary transport. To this arrangement the British Government assented, and before the end of the year Sir James Craig, who had been commanding the Essex defence district, was ordered to prepare the necessary force for Malta.

Concurrently with the arrangement of the military convention, the negotiations for a regular alliance were proceeding, but with constant difficulties, owing to the vacillating attitude of Austria, and the mutual suspicions of all the Powers concerned. Russia could not reconcile herself to England's retention of Malta, and England suspected Russia's real aim to be the partition of the Turkish Empire. Austria was clearly more concerned with recovering the old

[1] Leveson-Gower to Harrowby, November 28: Rose, *Third Coalition*, p. 72.

[2] Amongst other measures that were adopted at this time was the erection of the Martello Towers on the threatened coasts, not in a spirit of passive defence, but in order to set free an effective striking force. Another was the digging of the Hythe Military Canal. This work, which seemed to be designed to stop an army which had crossed the Channel, came in for much ridicule by the "blue water" men of the day. Writing in September 1805, from Hythe to the Viceroy of Ireland, Charles Yorke says his regiment is "at work in the mud of a large ditch called the Royal Military Canal, which is said to be intended to prevent the French penetrating into the country . . . when they shall have crossed another ditch somewhat wider and rather more difficult to pass" (Rt. Hon. Charles Yorke to Earl of Hardwicke: *Add. MSS.* 37506). Military opinion would probably regard this criticism of the work as superficial. It was, of course, intended to delay the advance of a force that had landed, and give time for the concentration of the territorial forces which had been arranged, just as the Martello Towers were intended to delay the landing.

Hapsburg possessions in North Italy than with the liberation of Europe; and as for Prussia she had obviously no end in view but the filching of Hanover. Even Sweden was only prepared to move in return for an unconscionable British subsidy that was out of all proportion to the service it was in her power to render.

To Pitt the position was galling in the extreme. For as the winter came on the situation of England greatly improved, and gave promise of freeing her arms. Her defensive system, as of old, was showing itself to be impregnable, and the fear of invasion was giving way to a fierce desire to be revenged on the man who had put her to so much alarm and expense.

The system that had been adopted was that which had so often proved its strength, and which no trick or device had ever availed to break down. Facing the army of invasion from the Texel to Havre was a swarm of sloops and gun-vessels, rendering the passage of Napoleon's flotilla impossible without battleship support. Our own flotilla was strengthened with a small battle squadron sufficient to deal with the Dutch battle squadron in the Texel, or with any small division that might escape the vigilance of our squadrons that were blockading the enemy's Atlantic ports. The whole was under Lord Keith, with his headquarters in the Downs, and divisional bases at Yarmouth for watching the Texel, the Nore for Dunkirk, and a third at Leith. The general plan of defence was to hold back the bulk of the defence flotilla on our own shores with coast-defence vessels, or "block-ships," as they were called, as rallying points.[1] Small advanced cruiser squadrons watched the French movements, and seized every oppor-

[1] The original arrangement was: Margate Roads, 1 or 2 of the line; Queen's Channel, 2; King's Channel, 2; Goldamore Gate, 1; Buoy of Rough, "a frigate to communicate" (*i.e.* by semaphore telegraph); Hoseley Bay, "a ship of force." Eventually they were done away with, and their crews devoted to a number of hired cruisers.—*Admiralty Sec. In-letters*, 537.

tunity of striking at the enemy's flotilla as it tried to concentrate in the ports of departure, Boulogne, Étaples, Wimereux, and Ambleteuse. At the Channel Islands was an independent cruiser squadron, under Rear-Admiral Saumarez, effectually preventing the passage of transports from that direction, and barring a raid on the islands. But it also had the important function of acting as a link between Keith and the Western Squadron, by which the whole position was covered.[1] This squadron, which was in fact the main fleet, was under Cornwallis, and was holding the mouth of the Channel, and blockading Brest with extension squadrons before Rochefort and Ferrol where a French division had taken refuge.[2]

In this way, in accordance with long tradition, the fleet kept a firm hold upon the invading army—the fundamental postulate of all defence against oversea invasion—and nothing could shake it. Napoleon, it is true, believed—as others had believed before him—that it might be possible to break that hold by surprise: by the sudden intrusion of a battle squadron from a distance. Cornwallis, he assumed, could easily be evaded, for he would be held fast to Brest by the exigencies of the blockade. This belief was due to a failure to understand the function of our Western Squadron, as Norris and Anson had laid it down more than half a century before. Napoleon regarded it, as many do to this day, as a squadron blockading Brest, whereas it was in reality a squadron holding the approaches to the Channel for all purposes of home and trade defence. The blockade of Brest was incidental, as were the blockades of Rochefort and Ferrol, and in no circumstances of reasonable war risk could a serious hostile squadron enter

[1] Barham to Cornwallis, August 15: *Cornwallis Papers, Hist. MSS. Com., Various Collections*, vi. p. 411.

[2] Pitt had offered this command to Lord St. Vincent, "which," he says, "I spurned at, unless Mr. Pitt unsaid all he had said in the House of Commons against me."—*Cornwallis Papers, ibid.*, p. 418.

or even approach the Channel until the Western Squadron had been brought to action and defeated. The mere confronting of that squadron with superior force had been found useless over and over again. The naval campaigns of 1779 and 1782, in particular, had proved this cardinal fact up to the hilt, and French naval opinion had grasped it almost as securely as it was held by our own Admiralty.

The actual light in which the situation was regarded by the British Government is clearly seen in the instructions which Lord Melville, Pitt's First Lord of the Admiralty, issued to Cornwallis, when in August 1804 he returned from his leave to the command of the Western Squadron. At the end of July he had come ashore for a rest from the strain of the blockade, leaving his second, Sir Charles Cotton, in command. It was only for two or three weeks. The invasion crisis appeared to be at hand, and so fully did he possess the confidence of the Admiralty and the country that neither could be easy in his absence.[1] Throughout his leave, Melville was in constant communication with him, and the instructions of August 24th were the outcome.

After reciting that the intelligence indicated immediate action by the Brest Squadron, the instructions pointed out that it might take one of two directions. The determining factor would be, whether or not the squadron sailed with a landing force. If it did not, it would mean that its object was to cover an invasion by the Grand Army. "This," the instructions say, "seems a very desperate attempt, and is likely to terminate in the destruction of their fleet, if they should be able by any unforeseen events to elude your vigilance, and thereby to make their way up Channel." So disastrous had been every previous attempt of this kind that the Admiralty did not think a repetition

[1] Melville to Cornwallis, July 29, 1804: *Blockade of Brest* (Navy Record Soc.), ii. 38.

likely.[1] "But," they continue, "if the existing Government of France is determined to risk everything in this long-menaced attempt against this country, we are not at liberty to calculate solely on what is rational or probable, but we must likewise keep in view such contingencies as may be barely possible, and such as passion and intemperance may give rise to." Cornwallis was therefore to keep up the closest possible blockade of the enemy, and to take measures so that if by luck they escaped, he could follow and destroy them. He was further warned that if their real intention was to enter the Channel and cover the passage of the Grand Army, they would use any means in their power to mislead him. Thus accurately did the Government penetrate the inmost thoughts of Napoleon, for it was precisely on this possibility of misleading Cornwallis that his scheme was based.

The various possibilities of the case were met in the following manner. If the whole squadron escaped and Cornwallis lost touch, he was to proceed off the Lizard where he would be certain to hear if it had passed up Channel. If it had not done so, he was to take station off Cape Clear, or such other point on the Irish coast he thought advisable.

If only a section of it put to sea and it carried troops, its objective would be Ireland, and he was to detach an equal force to act as before explained. If such a detachment sailed to the southward and without troops, the object would probably be a junction with the Mediterranean fleet. If the detachment was no more than five or six ships with troops, the objective would be in the West Indies, and he was to detach thither an equivalent force.

He was also to consider the possibility that the sailing of the whole, or the greater part of the squadron, might

[1] The leading cases were the Armada in 1588, and the French attempt to invade from Dunkirk in 1744. In both cases the intruding fleet was only saved from destruction by the weather and a *sauve qui peut*.

mean raising the blockades of Rochefort and Ferrol. He was to deal with such a movement by directing the two Admirals concerned "to form a junction with their two squadrons on the north coast of Spain, or elsewhere;" and he was to give them a rendezvous for that purpose. He was also to arrange for his cruisers to bring them timely warning, and for reinforcing them from his own fleet to the extent the strength of the escaping force might demand. If either Admiral was forced by the appearance of a superior enemy to raise his blockade, he was to join the other, and they were to wait in company for the reinforcement. Directions follow for the general manner in which the blockade of Brest is to be conducted, but in spite of their minuteness they conclude with a saving clause, by which it was sought to hit the mean between tying an Admiral to the main lines of the plan of campaign and leaving him a free hand. "We are aware," it runs, "that many circumstances may occur to which these instructions are inapplicable, and for which no provision is made. In these cases you must use your discretion and judgment for your guidance, giving us the earliest information of your proceedings through our Secretary."[1]

These sagacious and comprehensive instructions cannot, of course, be regarded as purely the work of Lord Melville. They were almost certainly settled in concert with Cornwallis while he was ashore, and they reflect not only his views, but probably also those of Sir Charles Middleton, who, as Lord Barham, was to be the ultimate director of the campaign, and who, as we shall see, was even at this time unofficially the confidential adviser of the First Lord. They therefore may be taken as the highest expression of the living strategical tradition as it existed after the great

[1] Draft, "Instructions to Admiral Cornwallis: Secret, Aug. 24, 1804," signed by Melville, Gambier, and Colpoys.—*Barham Papers*, iii. 232. For Cornwallis's own précis of the long document, see *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 48.

maritime wars of the eighteenth century, and as such th deserve the most deferential study. Over and above tl strategical exposition, it will be observed that they afford characteristic example of the extent to which the Admiral was accustomed to control the action of Admirals in hon waters, and that they also reveal how little the Boa regarded the invasion as a serious danger.

How far Napoleon ever realised the impracticability his scheme must remain doubtful. Sometimes he said l had never intended it seriously; at others, that he on failed by bad luck and the incompetence of his Admiral All that we can assert with safety is that no great mast of war ever so fatally miscalculated the possibilities ar limitations of invasion; and no great administrator ev failed so completely in organisation as Napoleon did wit the arrangements for passing the sea with his Grand Arm Nothing, not even the army itself, was ever ready.[1] S glaring, indeed, was the breakdown, that wherever th Napoleonic legend is still unsullied, the only admissib explanation of the astounding confusion in which th arrangements sank ever more deeply is that so great captain can never have intended the operation seriously.

Be that as it may, as the autumn came on, and Nap

[1] The final return of the state of the Grand Army on the coasts, and i flotilla (Aug. 1–15) was as follows:—

Ports.	Flotilla.			State of Army Ready.	
	Units.	Capacity.			
		Men.	Horses.	Men.	Horses
Étaples	365	27,000	1390	20,000	1200
Boulogne . . .	1153	73,000	3380	45,000	1500
Wimereux . . .	237	16,000	769	13,000	—
Ambleteuse . . .	173	15,000	673	15,000	—
		131,000	6212	93,000	1700

—Desbrière, *Projets et Tentatives de débarquement aux Iles Britanniques*, iv. 46

leon began to feel the toils that Pitt and the Czar were weaving round him, he let go, and was absorbed in making himself Emperor. For the winter at least the whole project was abandoned. Large sections of the flotilla were dismantled, the ports of departure were neglected, and the Channel sands began rapidly to devour the millions they had cost to make. After eighteen months of undisturbed effort, with a century of experience behind him, he had failed to solve even the initial problem of the operation; and to save his face before his disappointed country and demoralised army he faced about against Austria.

Under pressure from the Czar, her attitude to France was stiffening. She was even beginning to mass troops and form magazines at the head of the Adriatic and in the Tyrol, with intent to strike directly at the possessions Napoleon had seized in Northern Italy; and as the negotiations between England and Russia drew to a head, it looked as though she had definitely made up her mind to join the League. In Napoleon's eyes, at least, the outlook was too dangerous to be ignored. He was not prepared to face a continental coalition in British pay. To keep up the threat of a great invasion, which hitherto had served his turn so well, was no longer possible, yet by hook or by crook England must be kept quiet. The means, as he thought, were ready to his hand. Spain, as always, must be the tool of French ambition. Terrorised into opening her ports to French ships, she had for long worn her neutrality to shreds. A little increase of pressure would be enough to make her throw off the rags and appear in arms at Napoleon's side. The pressure was applied, and with the normal result. Pitt snatched up the time-honoured weapon which his father had not been permitted to employ. A blow at the rich treasure trade of Spain before declaration of war had been our regular procedure in like circumstances ever since Drake set out to strike it in 1585,

and failed, "the reason best known to God." Again and again it had been used, though seldom with success, and yet we never tired. Before September was out, orders were speeding to Nelson in the Mediterranean and Cochrane before Ferrol to seize the home-coming galleons of Montevideo. A new squadron also—of which came much heart-burning—was formed under Sir John Orde to blockade Cadiz and the Andalusian coast; and in November, Commodore Moore, in command of a special cruiser squadron, had seized four treasure galleons. Spain immediately declared war, and Napoleon's new plan took shape.

Spain's declaration meant for him nominally an increase of his fleet by thirty-two of the line. It represented with the Dutch a three-power coalition, to which our navy as it stood was barely superior. But Pitt's prompt action had caught Spain unawares and unready, and the utmost Napoleon could hope was that she might have some twenty-five of the line fit for action by the spring of 1805. Till then he must do the best he could with his own. Action of some kind was imperative in order to divert the attention of the British fleet from his coasts. He could even hope to provoke in England an outcry for peace; for well within his power was a counterstroke at her colonies. Thus originated that famous movement to the West Indies—not with any idea of a crushing return upon the Channel, but simply in a desperate effort to shatter Pitt's position and to get the British fleet off his back, while he faced the threatened coalition.

In the plan of operation which he had just abandoned it had been the part of the Toulon squadron to evade Nelson, take a wide sweep round Cochrane at Ferrol, release the Rochefort squadron, and, thus reinforced, to take another wide sweep round Cornwallis at Brest and rush the Channel. Under the new scheme for colonial attack, the Toulon and Rochefort squadrons were to sail independently

with a force of troops to the West Indies. There they were to recapture the Dutch islands, reinforce the French, take all they could from the British, and then return together in the spring to fall upon Cochrane, bring out the Ferrol squadron, and proceed to a French port. At the same time Ganteaume at Brest had orders to embark a third military force, and seizing the first opportunity of getting out, to operate a descent on Ireland and then to carry on north-about and liberate Marmont's corps in the Texel.

It is always difficult to say with confidence what Napoleon really intended by the tangle of schemes he spun. Knowing himself to be surrounded by traitors—even at his Council table—his only resource was to manufacture plans for their benefit which he never intended to use. In this case there can be little doubt, from all the circumstances, that Ganteaume's orders were intended for British spies in order to keep alive the threat upon the points where we were most sensitive; while those of Villeneuve and Missiessy with the Toulon and Rochefort squadrons were genuine. The idea is obvious. While a bare threat on Ireland or Scotland was sufficient for his purpose, nothing short of a real attack on the distant West Indies would avail to deflect British strategy. The whole was clearly a plan to take the place of his abortive invasion. It was designed to embarrass the British Cabinet and prevent them using their fleet and army together against him in Europe while he was cutting Austria out of the half-formed coalition.

What he saw beyond the point at which in the spring he would have the three squadrons concentrated in a home port we cannot tell. Probably he saw nothing clearly. He was too great a captain not to know that it was impossible to plan beyond the shock with Austria. The rest must depend upon the issue. In all probability his sole idea was to have his whole war strength under his

hand for what was to come after. It may be also that he was beginning at last to learn the truth, which all his predecessors had reached by painful experience, that there was no way of striking England down except by a fair and successful fight for the command of the sea; and for this, with Spain ready in the spring, he could indulge at least a hope.

His faith in the steps he had taken for intimidating England is evidenced by his next move. At the end of the year urgent orders went down to Villeneuve and Missiessy to get away at once, and no sooner were the couriers gone than he made overtures to George the Third for peace, and sent to Vienna a rough demand for an explanation of the Austrian military movements. While he waited for the answers he explained his whole attitude formally to his new Council of State. By the universal testimony of his relations, his most intimate friends, and his most capable and best-informed enemies, he at this time believed he had escaped gracefully from having to attempt the invasion of England. No one who aspired to rule France could afford to ignore the old war-cry of the Republic—*Delenda est Carthago!* Austria it seemed was about to give him a pretext for escape without loss of prestige, but he had to justify to his Council the terrible cost which his pose had involved. "For two years," he said, "France has been making the greatest sacrifices that it is possible to ask of her. . . . But to be able to assemble such forces, to have 20,000 artillery horses and full equipment it was necessary to find a pretext for creating and concentrating them without giving the continental Powers cause of alarm: and this pretext was furnished by the project of a descent on England. . . . For two years I have not been able to tell you this, but that nevertheless was my sole aim. You know it now and you see the explanation of many things. But we shall not have war,

and I have just opened direct negotiations with the King of England for a treaty of peace."[1]

He had scarcely made this remarkable declaration when the British answer came. His new title of Emperor was still unfledged, and all his vanity was concentrated in getting it recognised. The British answer was addressed to "The Head of the French Government"; it was signed not by the King but by the Secretary of State, and it contained a curt refusal to treat apart from the other Powers and especially Russia. It was an answer that could only arouse all that was ugly in Napoleon's character; and to make matters worse, it was followed immediately by a peaceful note from the Emperor of Austria, which snatched from his hands every pretext for attack. In the moment of his anger he found himself rudely thrust back upon his desperate enterprise—with his fleet dispersed and irrevocably engaged beyond the Atlantic, with his army sullen and demoralised, his Channel ports choked with sand, and his flotilla demobilised. His prestige and honour were more than ever bound up in the invasion, and the means at his disposal lay in more bewildering confusion. This and not escape was all his confident truculence had earned him, and there was nothing left but to pretend at least he meant to go on with it, with half the costly work to do over again.

Pitt's rough and even insolent reply, which is almost universally condemned, was exactly on a level with the way his father had dealt with Choiseul, and would have dealt with Spain. In both cases transparent chicanery was met with an almost brutal bluntness. Knowing what we do and what Pitt knew, Englishmen will easily pardon it. They will see in it the reflection of the rising spirit of the

[1] The authority for this is the *Memoires de Miot de Melito*, ii. 244, which the French Staff accept as trustworthy. See for this and an admirable summary of the whole situation, Desbrière, *Projets et Tentatives de débarquement*, iv. 336 *et seq.*

nation, the confidence in its increasing po
belief in its mission to awaken Europe, and
henceforth unshaken till the end, that the
of restoring tranquillity and freedom to the
Napoleon was crushed by force of arms.

The situation was ripe for a determin
negotiations for the league had proceeded
loyalty we could no longer act alone. On N
defensive alliance had been concluded betwe
Austria in case of any further French advance
Italy, or the East, and both powers were ar
effect. Prussia was still holding back in ho
Hanover as the price of deserting the cause o
Sweden had consented to place England in
Rügen and Stralsund, so as to give her a sea
ating in that direction in concert with Russia
Russian negotiations, moreover, had made so
that the main terms of the alliance were a
Pitt and Woronzow in London; and, simul
the harsh rebuff to Napoleon's overtures, a
d'alliance was forwarded to Leveson-Gower in S

The progress of the negotiations, howeve
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away from her own frontiers. A renewal o
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while the Russians operated in South Italy, ha
with grave suspicion; but on England's promi
let her troops act under a Russian General
Southern Italy the clouds were cleared. There
however, the question of our retention of M
final re-settlement should come. It was

[1] Rose, *Third Coalition*, p. 90.

which, unfortunately, it was impossible for England to give way. It was for Malta she had gone to war. With the Far East looming larger and larger in her idea of empire and the discovery of Napoleon's designs on the Ottoman dominions, Malta had become the keystone of her policy as rigidly as Gibraltar had been to William the Third.

On this point the whole affair came near to wreck. In the British *projet* and draft treaty nothing had been said about Malta at all. But in St. Petersburg, where simultaneous negotiations were going on, the Czar by withholding his ratification endeavoured to force Leveson-Gower to admit a separate article on the point. The Czar's idea was to use the whole treaty as a means of forcing Napoleon by way of armed mediation to submit to the arrangement of Europe at which the treaty was aimed. Obviously if the Britisb Government insisted on the retention of Malta the proposed mediation must fail. He therefore demanded that England should agree to evacuate the island if Napoleon insisted on it as a condition of a general peace. Leveson-Gower, who had strict instructions on the point, firmly refused to admit the addition. The Czar could not believe that Pitt, his new idol, could share the obstinacy of his envoy. He therefore referred the treaty back to London, with a positive declaration that unless the proposed terms were inserted he would decline to ratify. Pitt was aghast. There were other modifications on which he was prepared to give way, but on the question of Malta he would not budge. In his eyes it was the keystone of the whole fabric. Relations, therefore, became strained to breaking-point. To all the entreaties and protests of Woronzow, Pitt replied that France was always one of the greatest military powers that had ever been; her dominion already stretched from Cadiz to Civita Vecchia, and she was doing her utmost to make the Mediterranean a French sea. Nor was that all. The French meant to conquer the whole Ottoman Empire, and

hoped to thrust the English out of India. The liberty of the Mediterranean and the independence of the Levant and Egypt demanded our retention of Malta. In a word, the security of Southern Italy, of the Ionian Islands, and of all the possessions of the Ottoman Empire, were bound up in England's being firmly set in the stronghold of the old Naval Knights. Woronzow was unmoved. Persistence in the demand, he said, would break the alliance which had just been agreed for the salvation of Europe. "It will not save Europe," Pitt broke in. "The Mediterranean, the Levant, and Egypt, will be in the power of France the moment a British squadron ceases to have for a base a good port protected by formidable fortifications. . . . So," he concluded, "whatever pain it causes us, and it is indeed great, we must give up the hope of seeing the alliance ratified, since its express condition is our renunciation of Malta. We will continue the war alone; it will be maritime."[1]

Here we have a clear exposition from Pitt's own lips of the lines upon which he hoped to fight the Trafalgar campaign and the objects it was to achieve. The war henceforth was to be for the freedom of the Mediterranean and the riparian Powers, and it was to be no longer a mere maritime war, but a war by land as well. Woronzow was as firmly persuaded as Pitt that Malta was a necessity to the British Empire; and Lord Mulgrave, who had succeeded Lord Harrowby as Secretary of State, could press the point with a clear conscience in the interest of Europe. The Czar would have had the Knights of Malta restored, but Mulgrave pointed out that the sole reason why Charles the Fifth had established them in the island was to protect Christendom against its common enemy. This they had no longer the power to do. Great Britain, as the leading naval power

[1] De Martens, *Recueil des Traités*, vol. ii. pp. 110–111. For the whole negotiation, see *ibid.*, pp. 75 *et seq.*

with no territorial ambitions on the Mediterranean shores, was their legitimate successor; for it was only as a British port and arsenal that Malta could hope to check in that quarter the progress of the present common enemy of Europe. "His Majesty," Mulgrave concluded, "in reserving to himself the possession of Malta, consults the interests of Europe in common with his own by the retention of this only exception to the national sacrifices which accompany his Majesty's great and almost unlimited exertions in the common cause." Considering not only what the other Powers were expecting for their reward, but how long England had been bearing the burden alone, and that she was agreeing to subsidise half Europe, the price she asked can scarcely be called excessive.[1]

Such, broadly speaking, was the strained diplomatic situation when Napoleon and Pitt each developed the opening moves of their respective plans of campaign. The day the treaty was signed Villeneuve was leaving the Mediterranean, and a week later Craig sailed to all appearance straight into his arms.

For months longer the uncertainty continued, and some understanding of the complexities which the delay in the ratification entailed is necessary for any profitable study of the campaign. There seems to have been a real misunderstanding. The Czar had set his heart both on our evacuation of Malta and the reform of our Maritime War Code, and each condition he personally regarded as a *sine qua non* of the alliance. In particular, Pitt's continued insistence on the retention of Malta only confirmed his doubts as to England's disinterestedness. To our ambassador's protestations of sincerity he kept pointing to the delay in the sailing of Craig's expedition. But at last news came that it was actually on its way in the full strength that had been

[1] For the whole of Mulgrave's despatch, which defines exactly the British attitude as it affected Pitt's war-plan, see *post*, *Appendix A*, p. 473.

promised, and with instructions that were entirely satisfactory. The unratified alliance was thus partly performed, and the Czar's position became more difficult to hold. All he could now ask was that Craig should not actually commence any operations in Italy till he had concerted measures with General Lacy, who had been appointed to the supreme command at Naples.[1] This, too, was agreed. Pitt moreover ratified the whole treaty, with the exception of the added clause about Malta, and on this he even gave way a little. He was ready, if the peace of Europe were found to depend on it, to evacuate the island on certain conditions, one of which was that Minorca should be ceded to England in its stead. But this concession was only to stand if Napoleon accepted the terms of the allies at once and peacefully. As the result of successful war, England would still insist on the retention of Malta. The Czar was not immediately convinced. Still he fought for his own dream and the reform of the British Maritime Code, and eventually it was not till July—by a most unhappy delay—that his hesitation ended and the ratification was signed.[2]

In proceeding with the study of the campaign it must, therefore, be kept firmly in mind that at its outset the dominant factor in the war was still undetermined. No design or act of statesmen or of high officers must be judged apart from this controlling deflection. Neither Pitt nor the Admiralty could tell whether to design the campaign as a single-handed effort or on the great lines of co-operation with one or more of the first-class military Powers. With this caution it may be well to give at once the leading terms of the treaty, as it was eventually concluded.

[1] He was an officer of Irish extraction. He signed his name "Lacy." (See his letter of July 8th, enclosed in Elliot's despatch of August 9th, *F. O. Sicily*, 25.) Foreigners spelt it "Lasci" or "Lascy."

[2] Rose, *Third Coalition*, pp. 110, 143, 151. Pitt's views on the military situation as it stood without Prussia, and his ideas as to how the British army should be used, were explained in detail in a despatch to Leveson-Gower, drafted in July. See *post, Appendix B*, p. 486, where it is set out in full.

By the first article Russia undertook to do her utmost to form a league of the continental Powers, and in concert with them to provide a force up to half a million men. The second declared the objects to be: to force the French to evacuate Hanover and North Germany; to establish the independence of Holland and Switzerland; to re-establish the King of Sardinia in Piedmont, and to secure the integrity of the Kingdom of Naples and the evacuation of the whole of Italy, including the island of Elba. By the third article England undertook to further the common cause with her forces by land and sea, and to provide transports for moving the allied troops as the plan of operations should require, and also to provide subsidies at the rate of a million and a quarter for every hundred thousand regular troops the allies put into the field.

Here, then, was the great new factor of the changed war policy which influenced it from the outset. The British fleet was no longer to be used merely for maritime operations. England bound herself to use it in furthering a vast continental war. Should Austria alone join the league the main active theatre for our fleet and army must be on the Italian coasts and in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Nelson had long been clamouring for military action. If Prussia joined we should be forced to act in the North Sea and the Baltic, where we already had secured a footing at Rügen and Stralsund.

The second new factor was that henceforth the war was to be what strategists call "an offensive return." It was the realisation of the spirit which Pitt had inherited from his father, and of the advice with which Dumouriez had concluded the famous project of defence, presented to the British Government about the time Pitt had come to power. "It is time," he said, "to cut the thread which holds the sword of Buonaparte suspended over England. . . . Nought is more perilous than perpetual defensive, nor offers a vaster

field for attacks of all kind, whether near or remote, on the part of a foe. . . . Whither, I ask you, would this everlasting defensive warfare tend? . . . How could the Powers of Europe ever take heart anew if this system, so nearly akin to fear, were fated to endure much longer. . . . Doubtless it behoved to attain to the offensive methods through the defensive first; but if, from this year on, attack does not supersede resistance, then you will see the chances augment very speedily in favour of Buonaparte."[1]

To approach the Trafalgar campaign without these two factors clearly in view is to misconceive it from end to end. To judge it as a defensive campaign, to regard Trafalgar as having been fought purely for the security of these British Islands is to misjudge the men who designed it, and, above all, the men who fought it with such sure and lucid comprehension. For them, from first to last, the great idea was not how to avoid defeat, but how to inflict it. England had found herself again. The spirit of Marlborough and Chatham was stirring; she was striving to strike, and no longer waiting for the blow—to strike for Europe and not only for herself. To think of her as only bent on her own security is to lose the whole grandeur of the theme; to misinterpret the bold confidence with which her seamen took risks, apparently reckless. The lack of clear grasp as to how the great campaign was conceived has led lesser men in a later age to brand those strokes of genius as blunders of ignorant men. It is time such things should cease. Let us rather, in tracing the broad sweep and subtle interlocking of their moves, humbly sit at the feet of the giants who dared to make them. So may we learn what men, inspired by a living naval tradition and ripened with the maturity of long war experience, could achieve by right understanding, by instructed fearlessness of risk, and by intelligent submission to the central idea on which the great war-plan was designed.

[1] Rose, *Dumouriez and the Defence of England*, p. 260.

CHAPTER II

NAPOLEON'S FIRST MISCARRIAGE

THE first move of the campaign was made by Missiessy from Rochefort. In response to the urgent orders to get to sea which Napoleon sent down the day his overtures for peace started for London, he embarked his troops to the number of 3500 at the Isle of Aix. Here it was the Rochefort squadrons, owing to the shoals in the river, had always to complete for sea. To blockade the Atlantic ports securely during the winter was not regarded by the British Admiralty as a possible operation of war, but Missiessy was being watched by a detachment of the Western Squadron under Sir Thomas Graves, an officer who had distinguished himself as Nelson's second at Copenhagen. As his duties also embraced the blockade of Bordeaux to prevent stores passing northward to the invasion ports, he had to cover the ground from the Isle d'Yeu to the mouth of the Gironde, not far short of a hundred miles. To supply his squadron at sea was moreover impossible, and it so happened that just as Missiessy had his orders to sail Graves found it necessary to take his battle squadron into Quiberon Bay to water, Quiberon being the road we had always used as an advanced base for the Rochefort division ever since Hawke's great victory in 1759. Captain Patrick Campbell in the *Doris* frigate was left to keep observation. On January 8th he ran inside for a closer view, and found Missiessy busy embarking his troops and stores. Hurrying out again he met the *Felix* schooner fresh from Graves, who informed him of the Admiral's where-

abouts, and Campbell sped northwards to report his news, leaving the *Felix* in his place.

On the 11th all was ready at Aix, the wind was easterly with thick weather and snow, and Missiessy decided to weigh in the early afternoon so as to run through the blockading line in the night. Luck and good judgment gave him a complete success. He believed indeed that he had run entirely clear, but he counted without the *Felix* who was too vigilant. Next morning she sighted the French squadron, counting one three-decker, four seventy-fours, and five cruisers. All day she shadowed them, and under cover of night left them streaming northward on a rising south-westerly wind about fifty miles south-west of Isle d'Yeu, and ran for Quiberon.

Meanwhile the *Doris*, on her way to join Graves, had also sighted the French squadron, and under a press of sail, which led to severe casualties in her rigging, she had reached Quiberon, but only to find Graves had sailed. Hearing he was somewhere south-west of Belleisle, she tried to beat out again, and in doing so ran on a sunken rock. All night she toiled at the pumps, and at last succeeded in mastering her leaks. Then came the *Felix* to report the enemy's position, and Campbell grew desperate. A south-westerly gale was blowing up, and he knew Graves, according to the regular practice, would bear up into the bay for refuge, and then he would be unable to move. At all hazards he must be stopped before it was too late. Scarcely able to keep his ship afloat, and with his rigging badly damaged, Campbell struggled to beat out against the rising gale. It proved beyond his power; he had to bear up and anchor, and two days later the *Doris* foundered, all hands being saved by the *Felix*. On the 16th Graves appeared. The *Felix* signalled the enemy was out, and the Admiral immediately hauled his wind, and made a great effort to turn back. But he had run too far. In the teeth

of the raging gale he could not weather Belleisle, and there was nothing for it but to bear up and anchor.[1]

All this time Missiessy was struggling out of the Bay, suffering all kinds of disasters aloft, but still holding on with the utmost determination, and so got clear away. In the British fleet no one knew what to make of it. Some of his early disasters had been witnessed by the cruisers, and the general opinion was that the furious weather must have forced him back into Rochefort, or L'Orient, or even Brest. Brest indeed was believed to be his destination, and the northerly course he had been forced to take confirmed the impression. Cornwallis was not there. He had been driven by the gale to run for Plymouth, and did not return till the end of the month. Even so it was a full week before the weather permitted the three ports to be looked into, and then Missiessy was nowhere to be found. That the Rochefort squadron was bound for the West Indies entered no man's head. Who indeed would have guessed that Napoleon was throwing away the game for which he had played so high, by involving his fleet in colonial expeditions? No one out of intimate touch with the political situation could have been expected to divine the truth, and naturally enough it was at headquarters—the centre of information—that the situation was first penetrated.

But even in London, Missiessy's destination was a matter of inference. The first step was to strengthen the Texel blockade. But the West Indies and the Mediterranean were equally indicated. To the Cabinet the latter must have seemed the most probable. It was the one they feared the most, since the negotiations with Russia for joint operations in South Italy were just taking shape. Their next precaution there was to provide for the reinforcement of Nelson, should it prove that the enemy's

[1] *Blockade of Brest* (N.R.S.), ii. 158–166. Desbrière's *Projets et Tentatives*, vi. 306. For the Admiralty's criticism, see *Barham Papers*, iii. 251.

squadron had entered the Straits. It was done in the usual way. On February 14th, Cornwallis was ordered to send Sir Robert Calder, his third flag officer, with six of the line from the Brest blockade to relieve Cochrane off Ferrol, and Cochrane was to take six—a force equal to Missiessy's—and pursue him. He was to call at Lisbon for information, and if none was to be had to speak Orde off St. Vincent, who, since the breach with Spain, had been watching Cadiz with five of the line. If Missiessy had gone to the Mediterranean he was to follow him and join Nelson. If there was no news he was to call at Madeira, Cape Verde, and finally Barbadoes. There he was to take up Commodore Samuel Hood, who commanded on the Leeward Islands station. If still there was no news, he was to send three of the line to reinforce Dacres at Jamaica, but if he heard the enemy had gone to their northern base at St. Domingo he was to send six to Jamaica. In pursuance of these orders, Cochrane sailed from Ferrol on Calder's arrival at the end of January after Missiessy had been already a week at Fort de France in Martinique.[1]

In the Mediterranean Napoleon's sudden change of purpose caused the campaign to open in equal bewilderment. When Villeneuve received the urgent orders of January 2nd Nelson was cruising close before Toulon. He had appeared there on December 26th for a reconnaissance, having received information that Villeneuve was "embarking troops and preparing for some immediate expedition."[2] He was in one of the worst of his shifting moods. The *Swiftsure* had just joined with despatches that told how the most lucrative part of his command had been taken from him.[3] By tradition the Mediterranean station extended outside the Straits' mouth as far as Cape St. Vincent, covering the

[1] *Admiralty Secretary, Out-letters (Secret Orders)*, 1363.
[2] Nelson to Marsden, Dec. 26, 1804: Nicolas, *Nelson's Letters and Despatches*, vol. vi.
[3] Nelson to Orde, Dec. 29.

route of the rich Spanish-American trade. But so soon as Pitt had made up his mind to strike at Spain he determined to change the usual distribution of the fleet. The Mediterranean was so far from the centre of intelligence, especially when its commander had to fix his attention upon its eastern half, that the old arrangement could not work smartly in the new conditions. Pitt therefore sanctioned the formation of a new squadron to be called the "Spanish Squadron," under the direct control of the Admiralty. Its station was to extend from the Straits' mouth up to Finisterre, where it joined hands with the Ferrol extension of the Western Squadron. The man the Admiralty chose for this rich command was, as we have seen, Sir John Orde, Nelson's *bête noire*. He seems to have been possessed with the idea that Orde had never forgiven him for the Battle of the Nile. Orde, being his senior, had expected to command the famous detachment himself. In his disappointment he had behaved at the time with some insubordination, and Nelson seems to have believed that Orde owed him an undying grudge. Whatever may have been Orde's feelings under the smart, so far as we can judge, his sense of injury was by this time forgotten in a genuine admiration of Nelson's genius. Possibly it was this that accounted for Lord Melville's making an appointment apparently so tactless; but more probably it was because permission was at the same time given to Nelson at his own request to come home on sick leave.

But with the prospect of the French coming out, Nelson had no idea of availing himself of the permission. He remained on, unaware of the change in Orde's attitude towards him, and he would have been more than human if, situated as he was, he had not resented the pecuniary loss the new command involved. His letters indeed at this time are full of protests, somewhat suspicious in their emphasis and recurrence, that prize-money had nothing to do with his

disapproval of the redistribution. Be that as it may, the fact that is of importance is clear—from first to last Nelson regarded Orde, with whom it was of the utmost importance that he should co-operate frankly, with a rooted suspicion that tended seriously to imperil the interests of the country.

In eager expectation of an action to calm his troubled spirit, Nelson remained before Toulon till January 10th, and then, leaving a couple of cruisers behind, he held away for his advanced base at Maddalena, in the north of Sardinia, just as Missiessy was coming out of Rochefort. "With respect to the French fleet," he wrote to Hugh Elliot, our representative at Naples, "I wish to God they were out." His prayer was quickly answered. On the 14th Villeneuve found the coast was clear. Two days later he tried to drive off Nelson's cruisers, and on the 17th, as Napoleon was informing his Council he had never intended to invade England, he put to sea with eleven of the line and nine cruisers. For two days the British frigates shadowed him, and then in the latitude of Ajaccio both went off to Maddalena to inform Nelson they had left the enemy standing south-south-west. Why both of them left together contrary to the usual practice is nowhere explained, but it appears to have been due to the strength and activity of Villeneuve's frigates. To Nelson it made no difference. In his opinion there was but one thing to do. With his unsurpassed sensitiveness to the kernel of a situation and his enduring grasp of his place in a war-plan, he permitted no possibility of a diversion to influence his movements. He was there to command the Mediterranean, and the permanence of that command hung on the integrity of Sicily. We have seen how large a place it was then filling in the eyes of the Cabinet at home, how they were straining the resources of home defence to provide a force to secure it. So far as England's capacity for actively assisting the coming coalition was concerned, it was the thrust-block of the engine

Pitt was constructing so laboriously. And for Nelson, too, it was no less. In common with all Europe he believed that the entire conquest of Italy was Napoleon's immediate aim. He could not dream any more than Cornwallis or Graves how confused was the game the redoubtable enemy had begun to play as he felt his grip of the situation slipping. Had Nelson been less certain than he was of the point where Napoleon's most telling stroke could be delivered, we may still doubt if he would have done otherwise than he did. For all his passion for action, for all his firm belief in the destruction of the enemy's fleet as the solvent of all difficulties, never once did he seek such a decision at the risk of laying open a vital point. Never once did he expose what it was his essential function to defend for an uncertain chance of contact with the enemy's fleet. And so he acted now.

Without a moment's hesitation, in the dead of night, and a north-westerly gale, he led his fleet through the perilous Biche Passage and sped down the eastern side of Sardinia to bar Villeneuve's way to Naples and Sicily.

The reasoning on which he formed his decision he explained to his confidant, Captain Sir Alexander Ball, Governor of Malta. Since easterly winds had prevailed for a fortnight before Villeneuve sailed, it was to be assumed he did not intend to go west. As he had steered south-south-west and obviously wished to avoid an action, it was scarcely less likely that he meant to attack either Sardinia, Naples, or Sicily. "However," he said, "I did not choose to run that risk." He had first to assure himself the enemy had gone to none of these places.[1]

Having reached the south end of Sardinia, he was faced with a heavy westerly gale that held him there till the 26th. There his cruisers began to come in, but with no news of Villeneuve's position. They could only tell that one ship

[1] Nelson to Ball, Feb. 11th, and see also same to Melville, Feb. 14th.

at least had been disabled in the heavy weather. On this Nelson judged much as Graves had done, but with surer material. So wide and complete had been the sweep of his cruisers that their failure to locate Villeneuve, combined with the evidence of the disabled ship, assured him that one of two things had happened—either he had put back to Toulon or had passed on to attack Greece or Egypt. These two places were second only to Naples, Sardinia, and Sicily in the defensive function that had been assigned to him. Clinging, therefore, to the line he had hitherto followed, and of whose correctness he had no doubt, he held away for the Morea. There he found all quiet. Nothing had been heard of the French squadron, but there was news that the French ambassador had just been recalled from Constantinople. Egypt, then, was almost certainly Villeneuve's destination, and without an hour's delay Nelson carried on to Alexandria.

Meanwhile Villeneuve had had neither the luck nor the determination of Missiessy. With his ships encumbered with troops, he found it beyond the power of his raw crews and officers to face the gale. All was soon havoc aloft, the fleet lost cohesion, and Villeneuve, overcome with the oppression of an unlocated and redoubtable enemy, felt it madness to proceed. He consulted General Lauriston, a highly trusted staff officer of Napoleon's, who was in command of the troops, and together they decided to turn back. "Finding ourselves," he wrote to Napoleon to explain his conduct, "observed from the first night of our getting out by two English frigates, which could not fail to bring down on us the whole force of the enemy, and it being out of our power to make much sail with the ships so much maltreated, we agreed to return." This was on the 19th, and by the 21st he was safe again in Toulon, while Nelson, cleared for action, was still waiting for him at the south end of Sardinia. Obviously, then, if Nelson had chosen to make

a dash for Villeneuve directly he heard he was out, he might have destroyed or captured the whole of the ships that were still with his flag. A less correct officer might well have done so. But for Nelson it was not good war. The chance of contact was far too uncertain to justify uncovering the point of greatest danger.[1]

To Napoleon the breakdown of his naval combination was a severe shock. He was still bent on flinging his whole fleet into colonial operations, and on January 16th, the day before Villeneuve sailed, he was busy drafting a scheme for extending the attack to India. It was to be carried out by Ganteaume from Brest. With his twenty-one of the line and nine or ten cruisers and six transports, carrying altogether 15,000 troops, he was to break the blockade at a favourable moment, move down to L'Orient, where he was to pick up a ship of the line, and then to Rochefort for another and 2000 additional troops. Thence he was to proceed to release the Ferrol squadron, which would give him five more French of the line, as many Spanish, and eight or nine cruisers. Half of them would be armed *en flûte* as transports, and would have on board a further 6000 troops, half French and half Spanish. With this force he would proceed to Mauritius where he would find 3000 men. He would then have an army of 23,000 French and 3000 Spaniards, with which "indubitably," as Napoleon wrote, "they will make a terrible war on England which may bring about a final decision." Of the probable action of the British fleet there is no mention. Its silent elimination from the problem is striking. But it was characteristic of all Napoleon's naval strategy that, in

[1] Villeneuve to Decrès, Jan. 21 : Desbrière's *Projets et Tentatives*, iv. 299. An instance of an officer's neglecting Nelson's principle was Admiral Sampson's almost fatal attempt to intercept Admiral Cervera at Puerto Rico in the Spanish-American War. It was this immutable principle, "so imperturbably followed," as Colonel Desbrière says, which rendered futile all attempts to entice our fleet away from the time-honoured covering position at the mouth of the Channel.

sharp contrast to his military plans, he practically ignored his enemy or assumed in them an incredible simplicity.[1]

It was while Decrès, his Minister of Marine, was working out this remarkable vision that news came of Villeneuve's failure. It was also the moment when Napoleon was fuming over Pitt's rough defiance. The submission of Austria had not yet come. What was he to do? He had sent a challenge to Vienna and had failed to frighten Pitt. As the situation thus darkened, so his mind becomes almost impenetrable, and we can only grope in it by the light of the ill-considered orders he gave.

Missiessy was now beyond recall, and the first step taken was to warn him that he would be unsupported except for a few more cruisers, and that the combination with Villeneuve was cancelled. "His Majesty," Decrès informed him, "has decided that the squadron under command of Vice-Admiral Villeneuve is to have another destination. . . . Your operations, therefore, become independent, and should be directed by you in accordance with your original instructions given to meet the case of your not being able to count on the projected junction with Vice-Admiral Villeneuve." This meant he was to throw reinforcements and supplies into St. Domingo and come home. Rochefort, he was told, would probably be found open.

But what did Napoleon mean by the new destination for Villeneuve? Clearly not the invasion of England. Not a single step had yet been taken to reconstruct the shattered preparations. Even without Austria and Russia threatening him on his eastern frontier and in Italy, the invasion had passed beyond his strength, and now was the crisis of the Austrian threat. Villeneuve was told to collect his scattered squadron, and while he refitted, Lauriston was to disembark the troops, fill up his battalions to their

[1] Napoleon to Decrès: Desbrière, iv. 325. *Correspondance de Napoléon* x. 117.

full strength, and look out for more transports. "At the end of the month," Napoleon told him, "you will receive an order to re-embark for elsewhere, for the season is past for your former destination."

The day this enigmatic letter was written the orders for an Austrian campaign were countermanded. A pacific answer had come from Vienna, but still—not for a full month—is there any sign that Napoleon felt himself forced to return to the necessity of a direct attack on England. The French General Staff, after a profound study of the situation, suggest that he was still bent on his latest idea of attacking India, and that Villeneuve was to combine with Ganteaume. By this time he must have had his suspicions of the joint effort of Russia and England to bar his progress in the Eastern Mediterranean. What could be more characteristic of his methods than to outwit them by directing his attack by way of the Cape? It is indeed difficult to avoid the supposition that at this time he had come to regard the invasion of India as an easier matter than the invasion of England, that he was realising the truth of the paradox, which history proves up to the hilt, that in default of naval command attack over an open sea is far less difficult than over a narrow sea. The simple reason is that over an open sea evasion of the enemy's defensive arrangements is comparatively easy, as had been proved by Hoche's attack on Ireland and his own adventure to Egypt.

Possibly, however, the whole scheme was only intended for British spies, or, if not originally so intended, was used for this purpose when it was found to be impracticable. We know, at any rate, that from this time forward for several months he was under the hallucination that he had diverted our naval effort to India.

All we can tell for certain is that, whether or not the Indian scheme was ever seriously intended, it was abandoned

within a few weeks of its conception. By the end of the month, for reasons it is now impossible to fathom, he had been forced to take up the invasion again, and was preparing the way for it by a naval combination scarcely less extravagant in design than his Indian dream. Between February 29th and March 4th he issued the orders for his famous concentration in the West Indies.

To explain, so far as is possible, this startling return to his abandoned project—with the conditions far more difficult than before—let us see what was uppermost in his mind at the moment. It was undoubtedly the absorption of Northern Italy into the French Empire by forming a new Kingdom of Italy out of the revolutionary states which had arisen on the ruins of the old Sardinian, Austrian, and Genoese possessions. The main objection to this stroke of policy was that, if crudely done, it would force Austria into action and give a dangerous stimulus to the efforts of the Czar and Pitt to form their coalition. For some weeks, therefore, he had been trying to persuade one of his brothers to accept the crown of the new kingdom, and on their steadfast refusal he resolved to crown himself. Here, then, he had to face the certain irritation of Austria; and the Anglo-Russian negotiations for joint military action to prevent his further expansion in Italy were now practically complete. The obvious move, therefore, was to use the army he was compelled to keep on a war footing as a threat to England. It was the only way to prevent her putting forth such strength in the Mediterranean as would make the joint action with Russia really formidable, and encourage Austria to burn her boats.

Whether he still believed in his heart the invasion was possible we cannot tell. If he did, it can only have been by the well-known trick of his gambler's mind, that everything was possible on which he had set his desire. His star had once removed mountains; he had trusted it to

make the desert flow with milk and honey, and now, perhaps, he believed it could bridge the sea.

Nothing less will explain the madness of the resumed attempt. When he first set himself to the task he put the necessary military force at 150,000 men. Since then the strength of the British army and the whole system of defence had greatly increased—in numbers, mettle, training, and organisation. Yet, even in view of the clouds that were darkening the opposite horizon, he could barely keep half that number in touch with the Channel coast. Even when, after six months' preparation, what is called the supreme moment came—when, so the legend goes, he only failed by the blunders of his Admirals—he had no more than 90,000 men in reach of his flotilla. The arrangements for embarkation and transport were even wider of the mark. The ports were choked with silt, so that many of the boats, even at high tide, were aground, and months of labour did little to get the harbours clear, except in the unimportant case of Wimereux. In Boulogne, after six months' effort, not half the units assigned to the port could get out in one tide. The flotilla itself was still unconcentrated, entirely unorganised, distributed in no relation to the various divisions of the army, and in need of formidable repairs. The idea that his organisation was such that he could embark 150,000 men in two hours, is one of the most remarkable myths of the Napoleonic legend. The utmost he ever even approached was the bare possibility, in perfect weather, of getting 90,000 afloat in from twelve to eighteen hours, but nothing like this was ever actually accomplished.[1]

Undoubtedly, what caused him to shut his eyes to all these difficulties was the brightness of the reports from Spain. Stung with the blow which England had struck before declaration, she was throwing herself into the war

[1] See Desbrière, *Projets*, vol. iv., part iii., chap. 4.

with unexpected ardour. All that Napoleon had dared to hope from her fleet bid fair to be fulfilled. If, ashore, his prospects were darker than before, at sea they were far more promising, and he flung all his sanguine spirit into the naval part of the venture, ignoring the rest, with which he had no heart to grapple.

The first indication of his idea that an effective concentration of his whole naval force was possible in the West Indies occurs in certain communications he made to the Spanish Government on February 19th, but it was not till the 27th that the first orders were issued. On that day were signed directions to Missiessy cancelling his last orders to return, and bidding him stay where he was till the end of June, in immediate readiness to join such forces as should appear at Martinique. On the same day Admiral Gourdon, who commanded the French squadron at Ferrol, was told to be ready to come out with such Spanish ships as were fit for sea, and combine with a French squadron, which would soon appear before the port. Three days later the main orders went forward. Ganteaume at Brest was told to embark some 3000 troops over and above those serving as marines, and to sail at the earliest possible moment with twenty-one of the line, six frigates, and two transports with victual for Gourdon's squadron. He was to make direct for Ferrol, endeavour to destroy Calder's blockading squadron, call out Gourdon by signal, and then proceed to Martinique, where he would find the Toulon and Rochefort squadrons awaiting him. There he was to reinforce the garrison with a thousand of the troops, and then, with the rest and the forty sail of the line he would have under his flag, he would operate his return to Europe without losing an instant. Off Ushant he was to attack any British force he found there, and then push direct to Boulogne, where he would be expected between June 10th and July 10th. Such was the complete plan which Napoleon hoped to achieve, but alter-

native orders were given to meet the case of the Toulon squadron failing to appear. Ganteaume would then have twenty-five of the line, and after waiting thirty days for Villeneuve he was still to try to fight his way through to Boulogne. If, however, he found that from any adverse causes he had less than twenty-five, he was to return to Ferrol, where he would find a concentration of all the French and Spanish naval force in Europe awaiting him, and thence, without entering the port, he was to make for Boulogne as before.

On the same day went corresponding orders to Villeneuve. As Ganteaume was to bring out the Ferrol squadron so he was to relieve that of Cadiz, and to proceed with it direct to Martinique. There for forty days he was to hold his squadron in instant readiness to come out on Ganteaume's signal, for Ganteaume when he arrived would probably not anchor; and at the end of that period, if Ganteaume had not appeared, he was to land his troops in the French islands, do what harm he could to the British Colonies, and then take up a station at the Canaries upon the East India trade route. Possibly Ganteaume might meet him there, but if he did not appear in twenty days, then Villeneuve was to return to Cadiz, where he would find further orders. It will be observed that these orders made no provision for the concentration at Ferrol which Ganteaume had been told to expect if that at Martinique failed, but possibly it was Napoleon's intention to arrange for the latter when the situation was further developed.

Such was the giant stroke of genius, for so it has come to be regarded, by which, as he told Villeneuve, the destinies of the world were to be changed. What did his Admirals think of it? Their opinion is not on record. We must be content with that of their successors, given after patient and exhaustive study of the whole question.

"Two escapes," says Colonel Desbrière under sanction

of the French General Staff, "two escapes from ports blockaded by a superior force; two blockades to be broken, at Cadiz and Ferrol; a junction at Martinique already indicated to the English by the despatch of Missiessy—such was the programme if we confine ourselves to the letter of the instructions. It is useless for historians to admire it. Such a plan would be unworthy both of Napoleon and his genius, if we could discover nothing deeper in it."

And what is it that is found? Little more than another device to save his face, and escape from the hopeless invasion without loss of prestige. Since the army of Boulogne must wait for the fleet, three months was the least interval that must elapse before it could think of moving, and in three months much would have happened. By that time the air would have cleared. Napoleon's course would be more sharply defined. It is pointed out on his behalf, moreover, that the plan as it stands entirely ignores the enemy, whereas Napoleon's practice and genius forbid us to believe he did not take the natural British movements into serious account. He must have known, it is urged, how great were the chances against its success. "If Ganteaume succeeded," so runs the case for the defence, "in concentrating an enormous fleet of forty-eight sail in the West Indies, a great naval battle was inevitable. It might be fought in American or in European waters, but with such adversaries as the English it was impossible to avoid it, and Napoleon knew this better than anybody. . . . But then the defeat of Ganteaume . . . would certainly mean the end of the English expedition, but the fiasco would not be Napoleon's. On another's head would lie the responsibility for the check. . . . On the other hand, a great victory at sea—that meant the ruin of England, even without the descent being put in operation. . . . In short, the plan of March 2nd seems to be of the type which his secretary calls *thèmes à deux fins*. The worst that could come of it

was the defeat in distant seas of mediocre squadrons, a defeat which would quickly be forgotten in grand victories on land. But the plan in no way solved the problem he had set himself, 'to make the descent without being master of the sea.' On the contrary, it shrinks from the solution and adjourns it till the moment when the command of the sea, having been won by force, the very question of the descent would no longer exist."[1]

Such is the most authoritative French view of Napoleon's actual intentions. Had he really grasped at last that in the face of the British fleet, and its traditional strategy, the problem of invasion over an uncommanded sea was insoluble? Was he really riding for a fall? To British ears the explanation sounds almost as fantastic as the plan. The old confusion of thought jars through the orders from end to end. While they are mainly and ostensibly directed at securing permanent command by fighting, they harp throughout on the possibility of securing temporary local command by surprise. The grip of the problem is as loose as ever, and Englishmen with judgment unoppressed by the Napoleonic legend, will rather see in it the work of a self-confident amateur in naval warfare, the blindness of a great soldier to the essential differences between land and sea strategy, and something perhaps of the exasperated despot who refused to own himself beaten.

But the grandiose plan went forward, and while half the world was in labour with it, on the English side there was scarcely a sign of movement. Nelson was hurrying back to his post from Egypt, but everywhere else the squadrons were maintaining their silent vigil; and, scarcely to be noticed beside the stupendous combination of Napoleon, was Pitt's little expedition, painfully gathering at Portsmouth, which yet was to prove the insidious drop of poison—the little sting — that was to infect Napoleon's empire with decay, and to force his hand with so tremendous a result.

[1] Desbrière, *Projets*, iv. 871.

CHAPTER III

OPENING OF THE CAMPAIGN

OF Napoleon's design the British Government had no suspicion. All there seems to have been to disturb their home defence and their effort to push forward into the Mediterranean was the possibility of another colonial raid to follow that of Missiessy. To meet this eventuality, on March 2nd an order was sent to Cornwallis, who was then in Torbay, to form a flying squadron of five of the line and complete their stores for foreign service.[1] This squadron was placed under the command of Collingwood in his three-decker, the *Dreadnought;* but Cornwallis did not detach it from his flag, and when he sailed on March 7th to resume his station he had, with ships joining on the way, a fleet of twenty-one sail, including no less than eight three-deckers. On detaching Collingwood he would still have seven three-deckers and nine others, and with this force he was to blockade Ganteaume, who had been definitely ascertained to have three large three-deckers and eighteen others. In other words, Cornwallis was expected to hold Ganteaume with sixteen of the line against twenty-one.

In modern criticisms of the campaign it is always taken for granted that this relation between the two forces placed Cornwallis in clear inferiority. Whether this was the view of our Admiralty or of Ganteaume is, however, by no means certain. The difficulty of appraising the value of battle

[1] *Dreadnought* 98, *Tonnant* 80, *Mars*, *Illustrious*, and *Minotaur* 74: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 203.

units was in those days probably as great as it is now; but unless one can reach some idea of the standard upon which the dispositions of force were made, all attempt to appreciate the strategy of the time is idle.

One point comes out clearly at once. From many indications in lists and despatches we can be sure that neither the British nor the French naval staffs were content to count numbers only. It is obvious they attached some special importance to three-deckers over and above two-deckers. Estimates of comparative force always distinguish these vessels from the rest, and in the naval correspondence of the time the reason is made quite clear. "We had seven three-deckers," wrote Nelson's chaplain just after Trafalgar, "they only three; but their ships in general very large and carrying eighty guns." "He knew," says one of Nelson's captains in the great chase to the West Indies, "that the French had no three-decked ships in their fleet, and he reckoned on the great superiority in close action of three batteries of guns over two." When Hardy, his flag-captain, came to be First Sea Lord he inaugurated a policy of large three-decked ships; and Briggs, who knew him well at the Admiralty, assures us "he attached as much importance to three-deckers and 90-gun ships as Voltaire did to big battalions"—that is, he regarded Providence as always on their side.

In France it was the same. When, at the end of March, Ganteaume was explaining to Napoleon an abortive attempt he had just made to break out of Brest and how narrowly he had escaped being attacked at anchor, he said: "The enemy had three of the line less than us; but he had eight of the first rank, while we had only three."[1] It was a plea that could not fail to appeal to Napoleon, for the highest relative appraisement of three-deckers that is known comes from his pen. Speaking of Calder's action he says:

[1] Desbrière, iv. 478.

"The advantage of three three-deckers against a squadron that has none is equal to a difference of eight ships of the line, all enured to the sea and perfectly trained."[1] So extreme a view of the relative superiority of three-deckers need not be taken too literally, for Napoleon's object in writing the letter was to give the action an appearance of a victory for Villeneuve. But after all allowance made for exaggeration it confirms the high value that in both services was set upon three-deckers. This is the more remarkable because the new type of 80-gun two-deckers, both in the French and our own service, could deliver a broadside as heavy as the second-rate 98-gun three-deckers, and only one-seventeenth less than the first-rates.[2] But over and above weight of metal, three-deckers were regarded as having other advantages. "When it comes to boarding," writes Bigot de Morogues, "they dominate vessels of lower rate. The small-arm fire of large ships commands that of small ones; all the shot plunge and get home over the bulwarks." When British three-deckers came to be armed with 68-pounder carronades on the quarter-deck and forecastle this advantage of "command" became of course very great. "Finally," Morogues proceeds, "the crew can get down to board a small ship more easily than they can climb into a big one. In a heavy sea big vessels can use their lower battery more easily. If both have to close their lower ports the advantage of three-deckers will be still greater in respect of guns, for instead of three batteries against two they will have two against one. . . . Large ships, too, have

[1] For Gravina's opinion, see *Barham Papers*, iii. 262: *Correspondance*, xi. 72.

[2] In 1805 there were two types of the 98-gun second-rates. The newer or 18-pounder type were over 2100 tons, with a broadside of about 1050 lbs. There were only three in commission—the *Dreadnought* and the *Neptune* and *Téméraire*, Nelson's two seconds at Trafalgar, but two new ones still larger were completed that year. They averaged 2277 tons. The rest, of which there were eight in commission, were of the 12-pounder type, that is, they carried thirty "twelves" instead of "eighteens" on their upper deck. They ranged from 1870 to 2000 tons. These figures do not include carronades.

greater solidity and better resistance to attack." These views still passed current in the British navy, or at least appeared verbatim in all the English text-books.[1]

To determine the actual relative value of the two types in Admiralty calculations is more difficult. A week before Trafalgar, Nelson was urging Lord Barham to send him the three-deckers he had been promised, as he was sending Calder home in the *Prince of Wales*, and three others sailed "most wretchedly." "I own," he wrote, "I long for faster sailing ships; and if not three-deckers, two alongside an enemy is better than three-deckers a great way off." The logical implication is that in his opinion one three-decker fast enough to keep station was better than two seventy-fours.[2] Nor is this inference unsupported. For if we analyse the opposing squadrons of the campaign, we find again and again, that by counting three-deckers as two units, and seventy-fours as one unit, we get something like equality between the two squadrons. So constant is this relation, at least for the more vital positions, that it is just possible this was actually the rough basis on which our Admiralty made their distribution. The idea indicated is that, having thus secured nominal equality, they trusted to superior efficiency for the necessary margin of strength. A similar standard appears to have prevailed in France. When Ganteaume was urged by Napoleon to make a dash up Channel with his twenty-one of the line, of which three only were three-deckers, he objected on the ground that at any moment he might be confronted with thirty of the

[1] Bigot de Morogues, *Tactique Navale*, p. 27. The defensive power of three-deckers was strongly shown in the *Victory* at Trafalgar. In an unpublished letter of the Rev. A. T. Scott, dated October 27 (of which Major Marsh, R.A., has kindly given me a copy), he says: "On the quarter-deck, poop, and forecastle the slaughter was immense; on the other decks comparatively nothing; on the lower deck only two wounded, and, strange to tell, by musket-balls."

[2] *Barham Papers*, iii. 323. *Cf.* Mahan, *Life of Nelson*, ii. 333. Possibly, however, Nelson meant to write "*two-deckers* alongside, &c."

line of which twelve were three-deckers, "a force," he says, "which would be almost double ours."[1]

On the question of tactical values there still remains another point to be cleared up before we can approach the campaign with any security of judgment. Modern English critics of high authority have pronounced that although the British service was richer in three-deckers, yet this apparent superiority was discounted by the fact that, ship for ship and rate for rate, French ships were superior in size and weight of metal to the British.[2] This result is arrived at by comparing the nominal broadside, or weight of "rated" guns only. But this test is misleading owing to the fact that most of the British ships now carried a formidable extra or unrated battery of heavy carronades on their quarter-decks and forecastles. Even the largest class of 24-pounder seventy-fours, such as the *Mars*, carried from twelve to fourteen 32-pounders, which raised the weight of the broadside at fighting range to over 1000 lbs.[3]

As to the undoubted value of the new armament and

[1] Ganteaume to Napoleon, July 14th: Desbrière, iv. 640. The calculation works out in this way: 30 of the line with 12 three-deckers = 42 units. Ganteaume's 21 with 3 three-deckers = 24 units. The Admiralty finally fixed the minimum force for Cornwallis at 18 of the line. The three-deckers varied normally from 5 to 8. Taking the average number as 6, we again get 24 units, as against Ganteaume's 24. Similarly when, on Missiessy's return to Rochefort, Gardner detached Graves to blockade him, he left himself with 8 three-deckers and 7 others, or 23 units to watch Ganteaume's 24; but Gardner's flagship was the newly-launched *Hibernia* of 120 guns, the largest ship in the navy. When Stirling from Rochefort joined Calder in order to intercept Villeneuve and Gravina coming back from the West Indies, they had together 15 of the line with 4 three-deckers, or 19 units. The *Curieux* had reported the allies to be 17 of the line, but they were really 20 with six 80-gun ships. Gardner before Brest at the end of May had 10 three-deckers and 12 others = 32 units, including Collingwood's squadron of 2 three-deckers and 8 others, or 12 units. Under his discretionary power, therefore, he only detached half Collingwood's squadron, which left him with 26 units, of which, however, 3 were only sixty-fours.—*Blockade of Brest*, ii. 27. Many similar instances will be noticed in the course of the campaign.

[2] See particularly "Barfleur," *Naval Policy*, p. 212.

[3] Many of the smaller 18-pounder seventy-fours also carried twelve 32-pounder carronades, *e.g.* the *Dragon* (1815 tons) had twenty-eight 32-pounders, thirty-four 18-pounders, and twelve 32-pounder carronades.

its logical consequence, we have the opinion of that great artillerist Napoleon himself. At the crisis of the naval struggle nothing caused him more anxiety than the advantage derived by his enemy from this carronade armament. In March 1805, so great was his concern that he gave Decrès a definite order to re-arm certain types of ships including seventy-fours on the all big-gun one-calibre system. "I have several times spoken," he says, "of my project of arming ships of the line with guns of the same calibre." All light guns from 12-pounders downwards were to be abolished, and nothing but 36-pounders and 36-pound carronades retained. "I think," he says, "this carronade will have greater power than an ordinary 18-pounder. . . . When ships are firing at 600 toises (about 1600 yards), they will not do much harm; at 300 toises this volume of 36-pound shot will smash the masts and spars." Decrès accordingly was to arm a frigate in this way, and also a seventy-four "with 36-pounders in its first battery, and 36-pound carronades in its second, and lighter carronades on the quarter-deck and forecastle. "In this war," he urges, "the English have been the first to use carronades, and everywhere they have done us great harm. We must hasten to perfect their system, for the argument is all on one side for sea service in favour of the system of large calibres, and we ought to put the calibres higher than 36 if it were not for the difficulty of handling the shot. I specially desire that you will not lose sight of an object so important. I am persuaded that a seventy-four able in this way to fire seventy-four or seventy-six guns with 36-pound shot would have an incalculable advantage over a ship armed in the ordinary way."[1] The trouble was to get carronades enough, and all through the year he kept pressing his minister on the subject. "It was with carronades," he says, "the English set the *Lorient* on fire [that is, at the battle of the Nile], and in them they

[1] Napoleon to Decrès, March 13, 1805: *Correspondance*, x. 221.

have an immense advantage over us;" and a fortnight later more urgently, in answer to Decrès' difficulties in providing them: "The least that can be asked of the administrative branch is that soldiers shall fight with equal arms. It is the first duty of a minister, and nothing can excuse his not fulfilling it. Have we not disadvantage enough without that of armament? Your 'ifs' and 'buts'—that is no justification." Then a week later, as the crisis approaches and Ganteaume cannot move from Brest, more vehemently still: "But, for God's sake, ship me some carronades. It is only with guns you can arm ships of the line, and for ships of the line there is nothing but guns of heavy calibre." So every week comes a fresh reprimand. "The English," he writes from Genoa, as he is about to start for Boulogne, "without saying a word, have practised this method. Here's ten years we are behind their Admiralty. . . . I see no attention being paid to it." But to the end he could not get it done.[1]

It is clear then that we cannot assume that our superiority in three-deckers was neutralised by the greater size and nominal armament of the French two-deckers. However low may be our opinion of Napoleon on points of naval tactics and strategy, as an authority upon gunnery he stands in the first rank. It is entirely a question of gunnery and armament, and judging by these tests Napoleon—the man most nearly concerned and having through his excellent naval intelligence department the best means of knowing—had no doubt whatever that we had stolen a march on him, and that ship for ship we had a material advantage that was not fair to his own men.

This opinion in the absence of strong rebutting evidence we are bound to accept. We must take it that there was nothing in the respective armaments to negative the basis of comparison which is to be assumed from the actual

[1] Napoleon to Decrès, *ibid.*, June 2, 13, 22; July 5, 19.

British distribution, and which is confirmed by Ganteaume and Napoleon, that one three-decker in a squadron was regarded as the equivalent of at least two two-deckers. Even the presence of the powerful French 80-gun ships will not detract from the general rule, for we too had this type of ship, and any excess the French had would be balanced by our first-rate three-deckers, while the second-rates, that is three-decked ships under 100 guns, balanced the seventy-fours.

With this rule then as a rough guide we may approach the campaign with some confidence in our ability to appraise the relative values of fleets. As March drew to an end the real campaign of Trafalgar was about to open. To appreciate the situation it must be borne in mind that it was to open not only with the first moves of Napoleon's great offensive combination, but also with the first moves of our offensive combination with Russia. By the middle of March, it will be remembered, the basis of the treaty with Russia had been settled and the British draft had gone to St. Petersburg. Without waiting for the actual conclusion of the treaty Craig's orders were issued. His force, besides 300 light dragoons, consisted of six battalions of infantry, two of which were to be dropped at Gibraltar and the rest taken on to garrison Malta, thereby setting free some 8000 seasoned troops. Forty-five transports were ready for their reception, and for the escort two of the line, the *Queen*, a three-decker, and the *Dragon* 74, which Rear-Admiral Knight was taking out to reinforce Orde before Cadiz.

The instructions of Earl Camden, Secretary for War and the Colonies, dated March 28th, directed the expedition to proceed to Malta unless in the progress of the voyage extraordinary circumstances should make it necessary to alter the course. The document was drawn in the traditional manner of the elder Pitt, enumerating every probable objective upon which the force might be used with profit, so as

to give the General the freest hand to act in accordance with circumstances as he found them. But the main purpose was kept clearly in the front. "It being of the utmost importance," they ran, "that Sicily should not fall into the hands of the French, the protection of that island is to be considered as the principal object of the expedition." In his method of procedure Craig was to be guided by Hugh Elliot, our minister at Naples, who had to consider the possibility of having to act with or without the concurrence of the King of Naples. In the former case Craig was to do all in his power to assist the King to secure Sicily. If, however, the King did not ask for help and should be induced by France to close his ports to British ships, or if the French should attack the island or even be certainly known to be preparing an attack, then he was to use his utmost exertions, in concert with Lord Nelson, for the defence of Sicily, with or without the King's assent. Such was the substance of Craig's instructions—a clear enunciation of our old policy, that the key of the Mediterranean, whatever the attitude of its ruler, must not pass into French hands. Upon so much we were determined, and determined, moreover, with or without the assistance of Russia.

But further "most secret" instructions were given him in view of Russian co-operation. Here again two cases had to be considered; "first, that of an attack being made by the French upon Naples and his being called upon by Mr. Elliot or the Russian commander to assist in defending the Neapolitan dominions. Secondly, the case of the French forces being driven from Naples by the Russian army or withdrawn with a view to counteract the movements of armies which might be acting against France in the North of Italy." In either case he was authorised on application from Elliot or the Austrian or Russian commanders to use his force in Italy, if in his judgment he considered effective service could be done;

and for this purpose he might place himself under General Lacy, the Russian Commander-in-chief. He was, however, to bear in mind that there might be other services which would call for the employment of his force, particularly the protection of Alexandria and Sardinia, and he was therefore not to engage so far in the continental campaign as not to be able to withdraw his force if necessary.[1]

Sir Henry Bunbury, who was Quartermaster-General to the expedition, severely criticises these instructions. "The different and unconnected objects," he writes, "to which Sir James Craig's attention was thus directed, afford us ample evidence, that the views of the Cabinet were based on no principle or sound plan of operations." But clearly they were based—soundly enough—on the uncertain diplomatic situation and on its most likely developments. They were designed in relation to our engagements with Russia, and at bottom were the expression of a determination with or without her assistance to secure the naval positions which in Nelson's view were essential to the command of the Mediterranean. Could there be any doubt that this was the connection and the principle in the mind of the Cabinet, it must be removed when we know that the day before Craig's orders were signed a copy of them was forwarded to Nelson.[2]

Besides the duty of escorting the expedition Knight's squadron was to take down the Mediterranean and East and West Indian trade—all of which went together as far as the latitude of Cape St. Vincent. To pass this vast convoy through in the face of the enemy's undefeated fleets was no light task. Craig himself had to traverse 2500 miles of uncommanded sea in the face of five hostile squadrons, none of which were too strongly blockaded and not one of which had yet been brought to action.

[1] Bunbury, *Passages in the Great War*, p. 183. *W.O.* (6), 56, March 28.
[2] *Admiralty Secretary, In-letters* (*Secret Orders*), vol. 1363, March 27.

The principle on which we have always conducted such operations is to provide, firstly, an escort strong enough to resist sporadic attacks from minor cruising squadrons; and secondly, powerful covering squadrons to prevent serious fleet interruption. Knight's squadron formed the escort; while the cover was provided by our various blockading squadrons. All that was required was to link them up in regular succession, and orders were now issued for the chain to be formed. Cornwallis could make sure of Brest and Calder of Ferrol. Beyond the secure coast of Portugal, Orde was directed to look out for the expedition and see it safe past Cadiz and Cartagena a certain distance up the Straits. There Nelson was to take up a position to cover its passage to Malta against any force issuing from Toulon.[1] It was a bold operation, but the risk had to be run, and how serious that risk was we shall presently see.

As the last preparations were being made and the great convoy was gathering at Spithead, Napoleon's widespread movement was ripe for execution. From every blockaded port were coming in reports that could not be mistaken. Off Ferrol Calder obtained information that the squadron was to be ready to sail on March 22nd. On the 26th Ganteaume was observed moving out of Brest harbour into the outer road. Cornwallis had just gone home on sick leave: his successor had not arrived. Sir Charles Cotton had been left in command with seventeen of the line, and he immediately moved close in, for the Brest blockade, unlike that of Toulon, was always of the closest possible kind.[2] The idea of keeping the French in seems normally to have dominated that of bringing them to

[1] *Admiralty Secretary, In-letters* (*Secret Orders*), vol. 1363, April 6 and 15.

[2] Cotton had 6 three-deckers, 2 eightys, and 9 others, against Ganteaume's 8 three-deckers, 2 eightys, and 16 seventy-fours. Cotton, in his despatch (as printed in *Blockade of Brest*, p. 217), says he had 7 of the line. Collingwood says 17 (*Ibid.*, 223). Gardner was about to join in another three-decker, *Hibernia* 120, which would give him 25 units against 24. For Ganteaume's view of the comparative force, see *ante*, p. 51 n.

action, and in the present case nothing could have been more exasperating for Napoleon. His plan of campaign rested on Ganteaume's being able to get to sea without fighting. On March 24th he telegraphed to Napoleon that the enemy were in the Iroise passage and to sail without an action was impossible. The signal stations could only count fifteen of the line and he wished to risk an action. "Success is not doubtful," he urged. "I await your Majesty's orders." "A naval victory," Napoleon replied, "in existing circumstances can lead to nothing. Keep but one end in view—to fulfil your mission. Get to sea without an action."

It was under these final orders that Ganteaume on March 26th moved outside the Goulet or Gut into the Bertheaume anchorage, which had been heavily fortified to facilitate his escape. All he required was a spell of thick weather. Next morning it came and he signalled to weigh; but just as he was making sail the fog lifted, and in the light of a glorious spring morning the signal station announced the British fleet in the offing. Cotton was standing in on a gentle northerly breeze with his whole seventeen sail. Bound by his orders, Ganteaume directed the fleet to moor where it was, and Cotton held on to within five miles of him. It was more than Ganteaume could endure. He feared an attack at anchor, another Battle of the Nile, and though, with the wind as it was, a return into Brest was impossible, he signalled to prepare to make sail. "My position, Sire," he wrote to Napoleon, "on this occasion was difficult. I found myself compelled to disobey the orders you had given me, as to risking an action of which the issue was doubtful." He had actually made the signal to cut and form battle order as convenient, when he saw Cotton tack and stand out again. "Night closing very fast," wrote Cotton, "and having previously placed Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Graves with four sail of the line and other smaller

vessels to keep sight of the enemy, I stood out with my squadron." It was a fine chance missed, a chance of at least putting the Brest squadron out of action for the campaign; but seeing Cotton was only in temporary command he can hardly be blamed for not risking the fleet in such dangerous waters and for preferring to take a more open position, where, as he said, "should they proceed to sea I have confident hopes I shall be able to intercept them." But Ganteaume made no further effort. On the third morning the wind came fresh from the south-west and he was forced to run back into Brest for safety.[1]

As the reports of these simultaneous movements reached the Admiralty their anxiety centred on Ferrol. It seemed to be indicated as the focus of the mysterious plan that was obviously in the wind. Urgent orders were accordingly sent to Gardner to get to his command at once and to reinforce Calder to the utmost of his ability. But the danger was not there. Gourdon was not to move from Ferrol till Ganteaume appeared, and in that port too all remained quiet. Only in Toulon was there any change. "Get to sea without an action," Napoleon had telegraphed to Ganteaume on the 24th. "That which is to join you has started." This was not true. Villeneuve was still in Toulon and Nelson was watching him before the port; but it was characteristic of Napoleon's handling to stimulate his Admirals with rose-coloured information. When Nelson had satisfied himself by his cast to the eastwards that the Morea and Egypt were safe, he returned in hot haste to Pula Roads in the south of Sardinia, to meet his store-ships. There he was kept by foul weather all the first week in March. Not till the 9th could he get to his rendezvous in the Gulf of Palmas, at the south-west of the island, and next day,

[1] Ganteaume to the Emperor: *Desbrière*, iv. 473. Cotton to Admiralty: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 217.

having heard Villeneuve was again embarking his troops, he decided to take the squadron up to Toulon.[1]

At the crisis which had now come he had to act entirely on his own inspiration. Of two successive despatch vessels which had been sent him, one had been wrecked off Cadiz and the other had run into Villeneuve's fleet and been captured. He had heard nothing from home since November, and his position consequently was one of peculiar difficulty. He found at Toulon every appearance that Villeneuve was about to put to sea, but whither he could not tell. For a long time past he had believed that his resolute covering of Sicily and the Levant would sooner or later force the Toulon squadron out of the Mediterranean. Yet he still inclined to think Egypt was their aim, and he was still bound both by his orders and his own judgment to make Sicily and Sardinia his first care. To cover both the eastward and westward lines of operation was impossible, except by lying close before Toulon, and that was a station that could not be maintained indefinitely, nor while it was maintained was there any hope of bringing Villeneuve to decisive action. Nelson therefore had to make his choice between one line and the other. That which led out of the Straits was the line of least danger; the line of greatest danger was that which led to Sicily and Naples, and this one he determined to secure. But the other was not opened without an effort to force his adversary away from it, and entrap him into an action which would solve the strategical dilemma.

On March 11th Nelson laid down the whole scheme in

[1] From various references in his letters it appears that Palmas was Rendezvous 98. The position south of Toulon was No. 102. No. 97 was "under Cape St. Sebastian," just north of Palamos in Catalonia. A list of Mediterranean Rendezvous in use at this time is yet to seek. In *Add. MSS.* 34950, p. 49, there is such a list issued by Nelson in September 1805. It was the official list which was used throughout the rest of the war, but its numbers differ from those of the earlier list: *e.g.* "Off Toulon" was No. 93 in the new list.

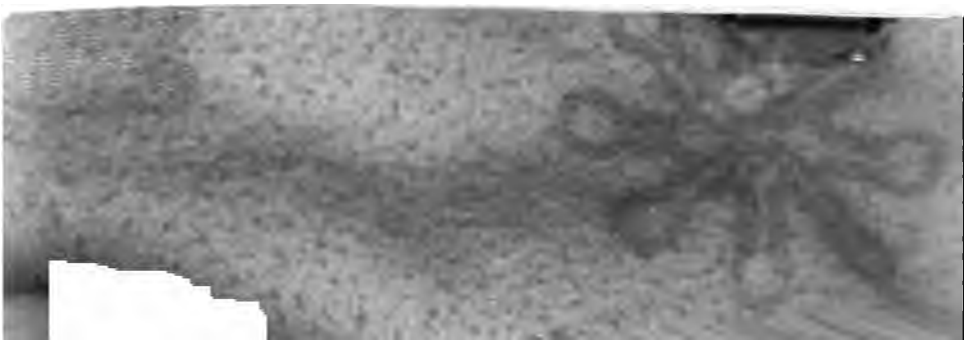
a "Most Secret Memorandum." The fleet rendezvous must be one that would cover Naples, Sardinia, and Sicily. Palmas was chosen. But before going there he meant to show himself off Barcelona. This was the trap. On the one hand it would prevent Villeneuve stealing down the Catalonian coast out of reach, and on the other it would tempt him to put to sea directly to the eastward where Nelson believed his real objective lay. Accordingly he suddenly disappeared from before Toulon and nothing but a couple of cruisers were to be seen.

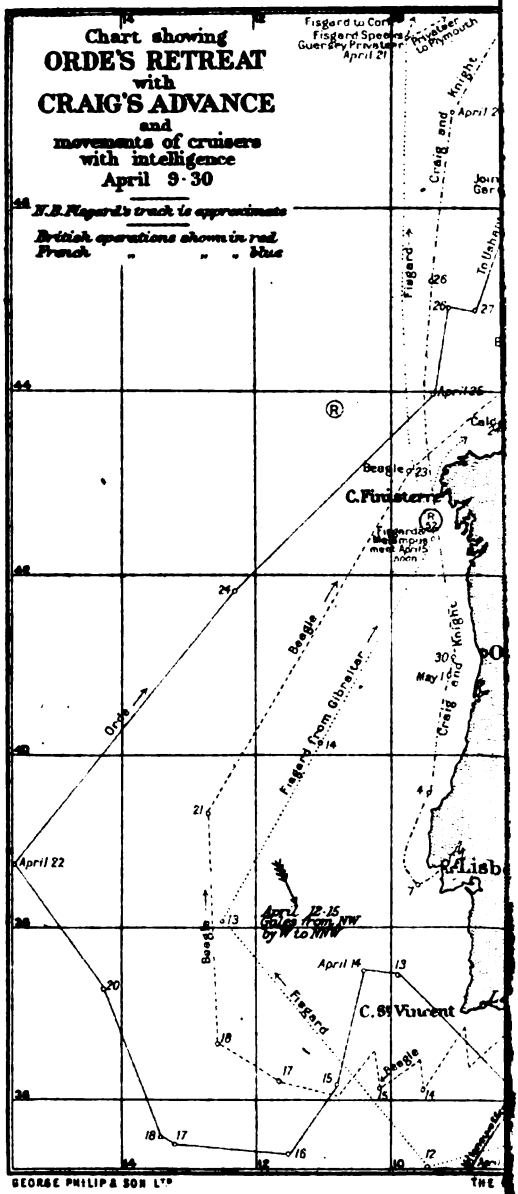
On March 26th Villeneuve received his final orders to sail for Martinique not later than the morrow. He had just heard Nelson had been seen off Barcelona on the 17th. "If he maintains this position," he wrote, "I shall have great difficulty in reaching the Straits." On the evening of the 30th he put to sea in the *Bucentaure* 80, with three other 80-gun ships, seven seventy-fours, eight cruisers, and over 3000 troops. In order to give Barcelona a wide berth he laid his course to the southward intending to pass outside the Balearic Islands. Next day he found himself shadowed by the two frigates that Nelson had left on the Toulon rendezvous. In the night they disappeared. So far then all was going as Nelson wished. The trap was acting perfectly. The course Villeneuve was taking would bring him well within striking distance of Nelson's secret position. But at the last moment everything was upset by one of those incalculable chances which are inseparable from naval warfare. In the morning Villeneuve had the luck to speak a neutral—a Ragusan merchantman—and learned from her where Nelson was. She had sighted his squadron not on the Spanish coast at all, but at Palmas. In the very hour of success the trap was sprung, and Villeneuve immediately altered his course to pass inside the Balearic Islands. It was a stroke of ill luck against which Nelson had not provided. A rigorous criticism will say that the chance

of Villeneuve's getting intelligence from a neutral was one on which Nelson ought to have counted in those busy seas, and that when he left the inner Balearic channel open he should have had a cruiser there to watch it, especially as it led directly to Cartagena where a Spanish squadron lay. Whether Villeneuve was bound east or west it was a probable line for him to take. But from this counsel of perfection Nelson's schemes fell short—perhaps from lack of cruisers—and Villeneuve was able to run clear down the coast of Spain out of his ken.[1]

An acute crisis in the campaign was the result. As Villeneuve thus successfully opened the great attack, Craig at Portsmouth had just completed the embarkation of his force, and all was ready. Knight was only waiting for a wind and for the trade to assemble, and to all appearance the two hostile offensive movements were about to clash at sea and precipitate a catastrophe.

[1] Nelson did apparently have a cruiser on Rendezvous 97, "off Cape St. Sebastian," and this perhaps he thought was enough to locate Villeneuve if he tried to steal down the coast of Spain. But as the Toulon squadron started south to pass outside the Balearic Islands, Rendezvous 97 was not approached.





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CHAPTER IV

VILLENEUVE'S EVASION

As yet Villeneuve knew nothing definitely of the great combination he was to carry out. So far as he had been informed his mission lay wholly in the West Indies, where he was to operate against the English islands and reinforce those of France. All else was under sealed orders, yet he had been given a hint that there was more beyond. "The Squadron," wrote Napoleon, "with the command of which I have entrusted you is destined for an operation of an importance quite above that for which I first intended it." It was with these words that on March 22nd he prefaced his final urgent orders for Villeneuve to get to sea and pick up what Spanish ships should be found ready at Cadiz; and as the Emperor penned the orders Nelson was anchoring his battle squadron at his rendezvous in the Gulf of Palmas to watch the snare he had set.

As he lay there waiting for the word from his observing cruisers, the strain upon his high-wrought temperament grew each day more intense. He was still fretting over his false cast to Egypt, for in his absence our Levant convoy homeward-bound had been cut up by a cruiser squadron from Toulon. Both the escorting vessels had been captured, but only after so stubborn a resistance that the greater part of the convoy escaped into Gibraltar. Nelson had just heard of their being there, and knowing they would be exposed to an attack from the Algeçiras gunboats, he determined to detach Sir Richard Strachan in the

Renown 74, which was due home for a refit, to see them clear.[1]

But anxiety for the trade was the least of his trials. As the days went by without a sign of any movement from Toulon, he began to think Villeneuve was not coming out at all. "I shall remain here a few weeks longer," he wrote to his friend Sir Alexander Ball at Malta, "when, if the French do not put to sea, I think it very probable they will lay up for the summer, unless the Brest or Ferrol and Cadiz fleets should come into the Mediterranean." To Elliot he expressed the same opinion. Ill news from Naples compelled him to face the possibility of a powerful naval operation in that quarter and was turning his mind from Egypt. It will be remembered that one of Napoleon's first steps in the war had been to order General St. Cyr to reoccupy the southern Neapolitan ports which he had evacuated under the Treaty of Amiens, and Apulia ever since had been in the occupation of a corps of observation, facing the Russians at Corfu and watching the Neapolitan Court. At the first sign of Russian intervention Napoleon had reinforced it, and St. Cyr's standing orders were to march on Naples the moment the Russians moved.[2] Vague rumours of Craig's expedition had further aggravated the situation. The Neapolitans had magnified it to 20,000 men, and were arming in readiness to co-operate. This Napoleon would not endure, and St. Cyr had been instructed to demand on pain of an immediate attack not only that the mobilisation should cease, but that Elliot must be expelled. To Nelson's dismay Elliot was inclined to submit. He had just told the harassed Admiral that his object all along had been to temporise "in order to gain time for the arrival of the foreign auxiliaries, Russian and English, which have been

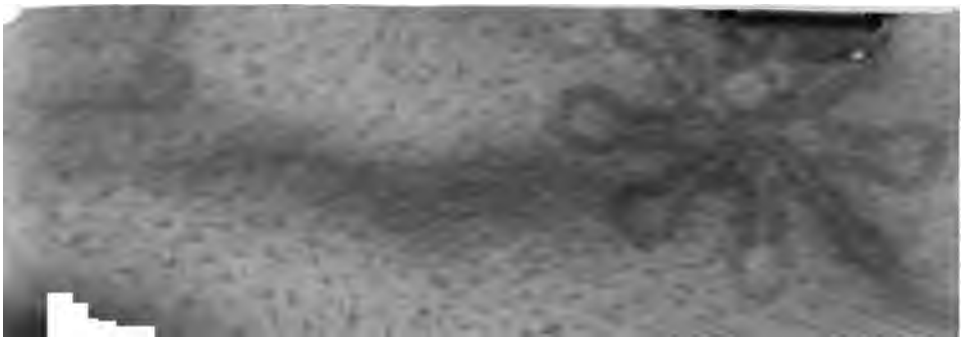
[1] For Nelson's "Order of Battle and Sailing" issued here, March 26th, see Hubback, *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*, p. 132. It is for twelve ships, including the *Excellent*, in two divisions. See *post*, p. 180.

[2] Auriol, *La France, l'Angleterre, et Naples*, vol. ii. pp. 33-6.

so long promised"; and if the King asked him to retire to Sicily he probably should do so. In that case he should want a passage in the *Excellent*, the ship of the line which Nelson had been authorised to keep permanently at Naples for the safety of the Court.[1] Elliot's apparently weak attitude completed Nelson's depression. "France," he wrote to Earl Camden, "will have both Sardinia and Sicily very soon, if we do not prevent it, and Egypt besides." Then he heard that Villeneuve had embarked his troops on March 21st, and his spirits rose. He weighed to move to the southward, but squally weather compelled him to take refuge in Pula Roads. On April 3rd he weighed again, and on the following morning one of his observing cruisers ran into the fleet with news that three days since, at eight o'clock on the morning of the 31st, she had left Villeneuve some sixty miles south-by-west of Toulon, or about 300 miles from where Nelson was. He immediately moved to the westward, "as I do not believe," so he said, "the French will make Toro . . .; but I believe if they do not make Toro, they will make Galita."

Toro is a little island off the south-west extremity of Sardinia, and Galita lies off the coast of Tunis just a hundred miles to the southward. What then was apparently in his mind was that the French, instead of making the usual landfall for a voyage from Toulon to Sicily, would try to get round him by hugging the African coast, and he must cut them off. There was still, however, another cruiser to come in, before he need commit himself to any serious movement. In the afternoon she appeared, but only to say that in the night of the 31st she had completely lost touch. She had in fact been thrown out when Villeneuve changed his course in the night on the Ragusan's report of where Nelson really was. In the absence of better

[1] Auriol, *La France, l'Angleterre, et Naples*, vol. iii., chap. v. and p. 223 (Alquier to Talleyrand, March 29th); and Nicolas, vi. 377.



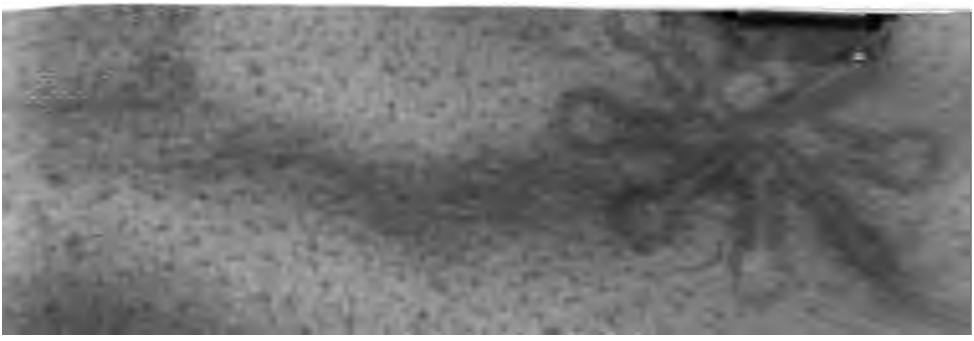
intelligence Nelson was forced to play for safety. He immediately decided to take up a position with his battle squadron midway between Sardinia and Galita, extending his cruisers so as to cover the whole passage from Toro to the Tunisian coast, and barring the way to Naples, Sicily, and Egypt.

With characteristic concentration of purpose he was fixing his mind firmly on his primary function. "The French," he explained to Lord Melville on April 5th, "could not pass before to-day if this be their route. I must leave as little as possible to chance, and I shall make sure they are to the eastward of me, before I risk either Sardinia, Sicily, or Naples: for they may delay their time of coming even this distance, from an expectation that I shall push for Egypt and thus leave them at liberty to act against Sardinia, Sicily, or Naples." From this clear determination to permit no lesser object to loosen his grip on the vital part of the war-plan which had been specially confided to his charge, he never swerved for one moment. For forty-eight hours he waited in the central position he had taken up, and by that time he could feel sure he had eliminated from the problem the possibility of Villeneuve's adopting the stratagem that he had suspected. Still there was another way in which it was possible for his adversary to throw his troops into Naples or Messina by evasion. He might double back from the point where Nelson's cruisers had located him and pass inside Corsica and Sardinia, either north-about or through the Straits of Bonifaccio. Till he had cleared this possibility everything else must wait. "I am in truth half-dead," he wrote to Ball on the 6th, "but what man can do to find them out shall be done. But I must not make more haste than good speed and leave Sardinia, Sicily, or Naples open for them to take should I go eastward or westward without knowing more about them." That evening to make the vital ground sure he redistri-

buted his cruisers, and next day moved off with his battle squadron to take up the position which the new possibility demanded. This position was at the island of Ustica, some fifty miles to the northward of Palermo. His object, as he said, was "to be ready to push for Naples should they be gone there or to protect Sicily."[1] His new station he reached on the 7th, resolved not to budge from it till he was certain neither Sicily nor Naples was Villeneuve's objective. "I must be guided," he wrote hurriedly to Elliot, "on my further movements by such information as I may be able to obtain: but I shall neither go to the eastward of Sicily nor to the westward of Sardinia until I know something positive."

We are accustomed to dwell with exultation over Nelson's brilliant inspirations and his fiery action, yet surely no great commander was ever more precise for "positive information," no one more careful not to act on mere intuitions. And surely no moment glows more steadily with his real genius for war than this. In resolute singleness of purpose he had narrowed his action down to the utmost possibility of what he was certainly able to perform, and consumed as his strained spirit was with thirst for action nothing would induce him to try for more than his strength warranted or to hazard the greater danger in uncertain possibility of preventing the less. We can easily imagine what the self-restraint must have cost such a nature as his, but he did not flinch. Of all dangers the least that could befall was that Villeneuve should quit the Mediterranean and abandon its command. His duty was to secure that command. Upon that and the positions essential to it he concentrated

[1] The new cruiser distribution was as follows—one at Galita, one on the coast of Africa, and one between Galita and the shore, with instructions to get information from Tunis. These three were to stop Villeneuve stealing to the eastward by hugging the African coast. Then there were two between Nelson and Toro, besides one to ascertain if the enemy had passed the Straits of Bonifaccio, another to Naples, and a fifth to hark back and see if the enemy had returned again to Toulon.—Nelson to Ball: Nicolas, vi. 399.



a force which was only just equal to the task, as though he divined that upon the preservation of that command the whole of Pitt's war-plan turned—and the way out of the Straits was left absolutely open.

So while Nelson waited resolutely for the one touch of certainty that alone could start him into action, Villeneuve pursued his way unmolested—unmolested but not undisturbed. On his heels was the menace of the unlocated fleet led by the "fougueux amiral," as they called him in France. On April 7th, as Nelson was taking up his position at Ustica, he was becalmed off Cartagena. There he could see Salcedo's squadron of six of the line apparently ready for sea, and he sent in to invite them to join his flag. They were willing enough in any case to have his escort to Cadiz, if he would only wait till they sent for permission and got their powder on board. But that was more than Villeneuve dared do. In the evening an easterly breeze came up fair for a run through the Straits and away he went, leaving the Cartagena squadron isolated.

While becalmed off the port he had heard that the situation at Cadiz was unchanged. Gravina was there with fifteen of the line, but of these only seven or eight two-deckers were as yet ready for sea, and he was being watched by Orde with a somewhat inferior force of one three-decker and four others, of which three were only sixty-fours. For Orde it was therefore a critical moment. His conduct when the thunderbolt fell on him has been universally condemned and covered with contempt. To deal so with the situation is unprofitable. Let us rather see what may be learned from an exact view of his difficulties and of the way he arrived at the conclusion he did.

He was chafing even more than Nelson at the strained conditions which the division of the Mediterranean station had set up. The Admiralty, in response to Nelson's protest against his loss of prize money, had just informed Orde he

would have to share a proportion of his captures with his brother Admiral. He had applied to them as to what he was to do with the treasure with which his ships were laden and this was all the answer he got. There were other sources of friction inherent in the situation which with the rest made it unendurable, and three days before Villeneuve sailed he had formally asked to be relieved.[1]

As Villeneuve left Cartagena some store-ships had joined Orde, and since the easterly wind had not reached him he was taking advantage of the calm to clear them. By mid-day the work was in full swing. Every ship had a transport alongside, the decks were cumbered with casks and cases, and the men were at dinner, when suddenly they saw a ship of the line running before the coming breeze under a press of sail, firing guns and making the signal for a superior enemy's fleet. It was Sir Richard Strachan in the *Renown*. On the previous day, in pursuance of the mission on which Nelson had sent him, he had seen the homeward-bound convoy clear of Cape Spartel and the Algeçiras gunboats and privateers, and had then turned back to Gibraltar for some needful repairs. As morning broke he was off Tarifa, and so had seen Villeneuve coming out of the Straits.[2] Instantly he went about, and accompanied by his frigate made for Orde, and had it not been for his smart warning Orde always believed he must have been destroyed.

The breeze that Strachan was bringing down had not yet reached him, but he made the signal to weigh, and prepare for action, cast off his transports with directions to retire to neutral waters at Lagos, and then did his best to form order of battle. As the breeze swelled his canvas he moved away towards Lagos under easy sail and in the larboard line of bearing—that is, in immediate readiness to form line of battle, and engage to cover the retreat of his store-ships.

[1] March 27: Nicolas, vi. 383 *n.*: *Barham Papers*, iii. 303–4.
[2] Strachan to Nelson, April 30: *Nelson Papers*, *Add. MSS.* 34929.

But Villeneuve had but one idea in his mind, and with his cruisers ahead of him he was content to make for the mouth of Cadiz Bay, without any attempt to molest Orde's deliberate movement.

It was a narrow escape, but there had been no panic or hurry, no cutting or slipping, but a thoroughly seamanlike retreat. What to do next was the difficulty. Ought he to stay where he was and wait for Nelson, ought he to go into the Straits, or ought he to go north and close on the Western Squadron? At Lagos he called Strachan to council. Strachan, who had just left Nelson and knew how much his mind had been occupied with Egypt, assured Orde that Villeneuve's escape could only be explained by Nelson's having gone again to Alexandria. Then Orde made his decision. He could not doubt that Villeneuve had come to bring out Gravina's squadron; and he had just heard the news of Ganteaume's having come out of Brest into Bertheaume Road. The indications in his opinion pointed to a great and dangerous concentration of all Napoleon's squadrons, and on this appreciation there was in his eyes but one thing to do. Strachan's cruiser the *Sophie* was ordered to Ushant immediately to warn the Admiral, and to inform him that he himself would close upon him, if, as he said, nothing occurred in the morning to prevent his doing so. "I shall make the best of my way to join Lord Gardner," he wrote to the Admiralty, "as an immediate accession of force may be of importance at this critical juncture."

In view of the charges which were made so freely by Nelson and others against him, it is important to note that it was not his whole fleet he was taking north, but only his battle squadron. The whole of his cruisers, as we shall see, were left behind with carefully framed orders for keeping touch with Villeneuve. Two days later—on April 12th—as he had seen nothing of the enemy his view of the situa-

tion was confirmed, and it became of the utmost importance to warn the Admiralty as soon as possible. Baffling winds were still preventing him from doubling Cape St. Vincent, the *Sophie* was still in company, and he charged her with further despatches in which he developed fully the appreciation on which he was acting. "I am persuaded," he wrote to the Admiralty, "the enemy will not remain long in Cadiz, and I think the chances are great in favour of their destination being westward where by a sudden concentration of several detachments, Bonaparte may hope to gain a temporary superiority in the Channel, and availing himself of it to strike his enemy a mortal blow." Here, then, for the first time from an English pen we have a just appreciation of the real situation, and it comes from this despised officer. It was not that he did not realise the importance of the Mediterranean, but that he felt the danger was past. "Could I have brought myself," he went on, "to believe the fleet would return towards the eastwards I should not have hesitated one moment to risk passing the Straits, although left ignorant by Lord Nelson of his position and movements." With him as with Nelson it was a question of the point of greatest danger, and that he saw at the mouth of the Channel. "In bringing to England the large ships under my command," he says, "I shall afford an opportunity to dispose of them anew: by which little can be risked, and much might be gained if the enemy's blow is aimed at England or Ireland."

For the next two days he laboured round St. Vincent, and then, owing either to stress of weather or to a desire to sweep the ground he was leaving, he stood back to the south. By the 16th he had stretched down below the latitude of the Straits, and next day he began to make the usual westing for a voyage north. In all this time he had not found a trace of Villeneuve, but whatever the intention of his movement, the result left him convinced of the

correctness of his appreciation.[1] He accordingly resolved to send forward the *Polyphemus*, his fastest two-decker, to communicate his final view to the Admiralty. She was charged with a despatch in which his appreciation was more fully reasoned in the light of Villeneuve's disappearance. He assured them that whatever had happened the enemy could not possibly have got ahead of him to the northward. It was true that his failure to find Villeneuve to the westward might suggest a return to the Mediterranean, but he argued with ability that the whole strategical conditions rendered that course the least likely and the least dangerous. Villeneuve, he urged, could not hope to evade Nelson twice; and even if he did pass back into the Straits reinforced from the Cadiz squadron, still it did not mean defeating Nelson. The men of the War of American Independence had too much experience of the preventive power that lay in a well-handled inferior fleet; and of his rival's tactical genius Orde had the highest opinion. "I dare believe," he wrote, "Lord Nelson will be found in condition with his twelve of the line and numerous frigates to act on the defensive without loss, and even to hang heavily on the skirts of the enemy's fleet should it attempt any material service, especially when encumbered with troops." It was so Kempenfelt had laid down the power of a naval defensive in the darkest days of the old war, and Nelson's own views to the same effect on the possibilities of retarding operations at sea are well known.

Finally, he clinches his reasoning with a last penetrating appreciation. "Besides," he says, "I am perfectly convinced that the French are too well aware of the advantage they may derive in a contest with us by having their fleets

[1] This curious movement is recorded in the Log of the *Glory*, Orde's flagship, but not in any of his despatches. The despatch he sent off after making it merely records, that he had not yet been able to double St. Vincent owing to adverse weather.

out of the Mediterranean, ever to send them back to that sea, if they can avoid it." He was absolutely right though he did not as yet know the sting that was about to be put forth, which in the end was to make it impossible for Napoleon to avoid ordering them back.

It is but bare justice, therefore, to Orde to recognise that his closing in with his battle squadron was in line with the British strategical tradition of concentration on the Western Squadron and that his decision was based on a sagacious penetration of Napoleon's war-plan. Had he made the move without taking every precaution in his power to keep touch with Villeneuve he would nevertheless have been seriously to blame. But in fact he did do everything that the means available permitted, and his first care before moving his battle squadron had been to make a thoughtful disposition of the cruisers he was leaving behind. He had already sent off a merchantman to find Nelson,[1] and before going north he despatched a cruiser to the West Indies and a cleared transport for Madeira to warn the home-coming East Indiamen. Nelson's old friend, Captain Sutton, of the *Amphion* frigate, with two sloops under him, the *Wasp* and *Beagle*, was all he had left to watch Villeneuve. Sutton was directed to take station off St. Vincent "to gain intelligence of the enemy's movements and prevent vessels bound east of the Cape from falling into the enemy's hands." If he ascertains Villeneuve has gone west, he is to direct all ships of the line he may meet to go to Ushant; if he has gone east, then they are to try to join Nelson. The *Wasp* was to observe Cadiz. The *Beagle*, which was already cruising between Capes Spartel and Trafalgar, Sutton was to keep there to hold the privateers in check, and report enemy's squadrons. But in truth she was no longer there. Unknown to Orde, she had already located the enemy,

[1] Orde to Nelson: *Add. MSS.* 34929, April 11.

and having failed to find her chief, was then well on her way to England.[1]

With a decision founded on so well reasoned an appreciation, there seems little fault to find. It has been objected that he might better perhaps have fallen back with his battle squadron on Calder, and this indeed was what the Admiralty ordered him to do when they knew what had happened. But in view of the prevailing northerly winds, Ferrol was notoriously hard to reach. The true course for Ushant lay far to the westward, and Nelson himself was afterwards forced to take it when he in his turn closed on Cornwallis. The fact is, however, that in spite of these difficulties Orde did try to get touch with Calder, and it was not his fault that he failed. After holding the usual course north-westward till the 22nd, he found a wind that enabled him to reach north-east, and in three days he passed near the Finisterre rendezvous. There he should have found one of Calder's cruisers, which was always stationed there, but the rendezvous was bare. The fact was the *Melampus* (Captain Poyntz) had left it just a week before. By a piece of extraordinarily smart work, to be related presently, he had got news of Villeneuve's having passed the Straits, and had gone off to warn Calder. Before he could be replaced Orde arrived. Nevertheless Orde held on till he was some fifty miles north-west of Ferrol and actually on Calder's station. Still there was no trace of him, and Orde, assuming apparently that he must have had news of Villeneuve and fallen back on Ushant, stood away north to do the same.[2]

Such are the true facts of this interesting case, and in face of them it is bare justice to revise the cruel judgment

[1] For Orde's despatches and cruiser orders, see *Admiralty Secretary, In-letters*, 410, March 19, April 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19; and for his flag-captain's report, which entirely confirms them, Ralfe, *Naval Biography*, ii. 76. For the *Beagle's* movements, see *post*, p. 122–3.

[2] Log of the *Glory*. For the *Melampus*, see her *Log*, and Gardner to Marsden, April 22: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 236, and *post*, p. 81.

which has passed into history upon Nelson's hasty and ill-informed strictures. If Orde failed to do all that might have been done, it was mainly due to the disposition of his scanty cruisers. In the arrangement he adopted there was one important point he had failed to reckon, and that was the moral effect of Nelson's unlocated fleet on the French Admiral's nerves. Yet the omission was pardonable. He was not to guess that Villeneuve, having risked so much to join Gravina's fleet, would not dare to wait long enough to make the junction complete. Yet so it was. At eight o'clock on April 9th the French anchored outside the bay and signalled for the *Aigle*, a French seventy-four that had taken refuge there early in the war, and to Gravina and the Spaniards to come out. By ten o'clock they had begun to move, and at one o'clock Villeneuve made the signal to weigh. In his eagerness to hide his tracks from Nelson he dared not sacrifice the obscurity of a single night. After waiting less than four hours, he held away in the dark, leaving the Spaniards to straggle after him as best they could. Had Orde remained he might have captured them nearly all, but can he be blamed if he never thought such a movement possible? And yet—if he had only waited to make sure, if just for one day he had "hung heavily on their skirts," as he expected Nelson to do! But his chance was gone, and so it happened beyond all calculation before Sutton could even begin his observation, Villeneuve and Gravina were gone, and from that moment they were completely lost to British ken.[1]

[1] On Orde's arrival home he was ordered to strike his flag, and was never employed again. But it is clear from his correspondence with Barham that this had nothing to do with his retreat. In protesting against the order he reminds Barham of "the flattering manner in which you was pleased to mark your entire approbation of my conduct when I had the honour of paying my personal respects to you at the Admiralty." His misfortunes were solely due to his hasty letter of March 27, resenting the order to share his prizes with Nelson—a letter which he regarded as private, but which Barham considered must go before the Board. Barham advised him to apply for re-employment, but this he obstinately refused to do.—*Barham Papers*, iii. 305–8.

CHAPTER V

LORD BARHAM AT WORK

At home, in the centre of war direction, all was confusion. No moment could have been more inopportune for the escape of the Toulon squadron. At the end of the previous year the famous Commission for inquiring into the state of the Navy, which had been sitting since 1802, issued its Tenth Report, and public opinion was startled with irrefutable evidence that certain irregularities had been permitted with the Navy balances. Lord Melville as First Lord was of course responsible. He was moreover a bosom friend of Pitt, and the temptation for the Opposition to raise a storm was irresistible. Just as Villeneuve was approaching the Straits it burst with a formal indictment in the House of Commons. Pitt exhausted all his powers in the defence of the friend who had been serving him and the country with so much ability. So brilliant and impassioned was his effort that he was within an ace of success. In the end the motion was carried against him, but only by the Speaker's casting vote. Under the shock Pitt broke down, and as he rose to leave the House the young bloods of his party closed round like a body-guard lest his enemies should see his tears. Next day, as Orde's blockade was being broken, Melville resigned, and the Admiralty was without a head.

Fortunately there was at hand a means of preserving continuity. The veteran Sir Charles Middleton was still alive, and though just turned eighty was still full of vigour of mind and body. Throughout the War of American Inde-

pendence he had been Controller, standing out through that period of inept administration as the pillar of the service, the confidant to whom all the best men afloat turned in their distress and despair. During his tenure of the office the Supply department of the Navy had been put at last in a fairly efficient state, though he himself was dissatisfied. He longed to see much further improvement, which without support from above he had not the power to effect. A few years later the power he sought seemed within his grasp. In 1788 Pitt, during his first administration, decided to replace Lord Howe by a civilian. The man he selected was his own inexperienced and not too capable elder brother, Lord Chatham. He had a remarkable talent, however, for smoothing business in the Cabinet, and to meet the inevitable objections to the appointment of such a man to the head of the Admiralty, Pitt intended, so Grenville says, to offer the post of First Sea Lord to Middleton. Though Middleton had never flown his flag, he was recognised as a master of the naval art second only to Howe himself. "Sir Charles Middleton's name and character," wrote Grenville, "will hold out a solution." In Middleton's correspondence, however, there is no trace of anything but disappointment at not having been given a seat on the Board.[1] But worse was to come. Even as Comptroller he found himself ignored. His recommendations were overridden, and his proposals for reform pigeon-holed. Chatham would do nothing. By 1790 his position had become unendurable, and in February he placed his resignation in Pitt's hands. The evidence, he explained, which he had given before the late Commission of Inquiry as to the abuses rife in the Navy Board, had created so much jealousy of him in the Office that in view of the delay that was going to occur in acting on its report it was impossible for him to go on. Pitt and his brother

[1] Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, i. 377; *Barham Papers*, ii. 323.

apparently tried to induce him to remain, but he was obdurate. "The motives of my resignation," he wrote to the Prime Minister a week or two later, "are by no means merely personal. I am so firmly persuaded that the present situation of the Navy Office could afford me no means of continuing any longer useful, that I flatter myself with your and Lord Chatham's candour in admitting the propriety of my resignation."[1] In 1794, however, he was given a seat on the Board under Lord Chatham, but his attitude to social and political influence was as uncompromising as ever, and his tenure was short. In the following year, under Chatham's successor, he refused to sign an order, which he regarded as subversive of the sound traditions of the service, and was forced to resign.[2]

Since then he had been unemployed but not unoccupied. Melville was his near kinsman and rested on him as his confidential adviser. Wilberforce, indeed, who had found in Middleton's progressive mind one of his earliest supporters in the Slave Trade crusade, assures us that "Lord Melville's plans for the naval force of the kingdom were in fact Sir Charles's."[3] Seeing that Middleton had recently been made head of a Committee to carry out the recommendations of the late Inquiry, this is credible enough, and indeed by no other means can we account for the precision and balance with which all the best of the old practice had been embodied in the strategy of the war.

A further reason for Pitt's insisting on the appointment was, if we may believe Wilberforce, that Melville himself had named Middleton as the best man to succeed him.

[1] Middleton to Pitt, Feb. 8 and March 15, 1790: *Chatham Papers, Bundle* 111. He left in Pitt's hands a long and detailed memo. on the reorganisation of the Board.—*Ibid.* and *Bundle* 245. And see *Barham Papers*, iii. 337–50.

[2] *Ibid.*, 418 *et seq.*

[3] Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, iv. 287, and Wilberforce's *Life*, iii. 223. In the *Barham Papers* there is this "Note for Mr. James:" "Mr. Pitt coming to power, it was decided by Mr. Pitt and Lord Melville to consult Sir Charles Middleton in all matters connected with the restoration of the fleet." The connection between this Mr. James and the historian is quite uncertain.

But it was not without a severe struggle that the minister got his way. The King wanted Chatham again or Castlereagh or Charles Yorke, who had been Secretary for War under the last administration. Addington, from whose inadequate hands Pitt had snatched the direction of the war, had consented early in the year to join his Government, with the title of Lord Sidmouth, but characteristically he expected further reward. Now he demanded the vacant place for one of his own men. In the stress of the war on his enfeebled constitution it was more than Pitt could endure. Without a sure hand at the Admiralty he must break down. "It is inconceivable," wrote Woronzow to his Government in the midst of the political and naval crisis, "how one man can suffice for such a weight of business and fatigue; how he can keep straight in his head so many tangled and heterogeneous matters; how he can disentangle and grasp them and develop them with such singular judgment and lucidity."[1] For a fortnight Pitt hesitated under the strain. Then he informed Sidmouth that further delay was impossible and that he had submitted Middleton's name to the King. Sidmouth and his closest follower, the Earl of Buckinghamshire, who was his nominee for the place, immediately tendered their resignations. To all Pitt's other troubles was added a ministerial crisis; but he persevered, and finally, on promising Sidmouth that Middleton's appointment was to be regarded "as not for long," both the recalcitrants consented to retain office.

So the veteran was duly gazetted as First Lord. To get over the difficulty of his not being in Parliament he was raised to the peerage as Lord Barham, though the King, in giving his assent, made the remarkable stipulation that "his attending Cabinet meetings ought to be confined to subjects regarding the Navy."[2] Thus at the eleventh hour came

[1] Woronzow to Czartoryski: De Martens, *Recueil de Traités*, xi. 109.
[2] Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, iv. Appendix, p. xxiii.

Middleton's long-deferred chance of setting his seal on the great work to which he had devoted his strenuous life; and thus at the crying moment the country, by Pitt's firmness and sagacity, secured for her councils the man who, for ripe experience in the direction of naval war in all its breadth and detail, had not a rival in the service or in Europe. Even Charles Yorke, in spite of his disappointment in not getting the post himself, could say handsomely, "The news to-day is, Sir Charles Middleton is to be First Lord. I was not aware that at his advanced age his health and faculties were equal to such a post. If they are he is indisputably the fittest man that could be chosen to occupy it at the time. His abilities were always considered great, his experience is consummate, and he has few equals in application and method of business."[1] It was not, however, till the last day of April that Barham's appointment was confirmed and the crisis was at an end.

In the height of it—on the 19th—Craig and Knight had put to sea. It was high time, if any good was to come of the expedition. Already the Czar had been protesting at the delay, and Napoleon was just starting for Milan to crown himself King of Italy. Now or never was the time to act. Yet as Craig and his troops pursued their way down Channel there were flying across the Bay two cruisers with the momentous news that the Toulon fleet had passed the Straits—too late to warn the Government that all had gone wrong. Villeneuve was out, no one knew where; neither Nelson nor Orde had received the orders for covering Craig's passage, and Knight had only a ninety-eight and one seventy-four to escort the expedition. It was practically in the air.

Not till a week after the expedition had sailed was the alarming truth known, and then only by the promptness

[1] To Lord Hardwicke, Viceroy of Ireland, April 26: *Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS.* 35706.

and decision of a detached cruiser captain. As Villeneuve passed through the Straits, Captain Lord Mark Kerr, of the frigate *Fisgard*, was refitting in Gibraltar with half his gear ashore.[1] With prompt decision he hired a brig, put a lieutenant in command, and sent her away to find Nelson. Working all night long, while Villeneuve was hurrying away from Cadiz, he managed to put to sea early on the 10th, leaving his gear behind him, and determined to carry the news to Ireland and Ushant with the utmost possible speed.[2] Outside the Straits not a sign of the enemy was to be seen. He spoke two or three cruising privateers, but they too had not a word to tell, so mysteriously had Villeneuve disappeared. His luck was incredible, and Kerr had nothing to carry with him but the certainty that he had passed the Straits. In five days, in spite of the north-westerly winds that had baffled Orde's efforts to double Cape St. Vincent, he managed to speak the *Melampus*, the cruiser which Calder kept stationed on the regular Finisterre rendezvous.[3] She went off to Calder and Calder sent her on to Gardner, leaving Kerr free to go straight on to warn Ireland. Calder, unlike Orde, boldly held his ground, but his case was widely different. Orde's blockade had been broken, Calder's had not, and it was obviously his duty to maintain it as long as he could. Moreover he was in no danger of being embayed and held to mercy, as Orde was in the precarious winds of the Cadiz station. By no means could a squadron coming from the south force him to action if he chose to retire. He therefore contented himself with retaining one

[1] He had just returned from escorting Nelson's victual and coal ships to Rendezvous 97, that is, under Cape San Sebastian, on the Catalonian coast. Nelson to Capel: Nicolas, vi. 409.

[2] Lord Mark Kerr to Nelson, April 9: *Nelson Papers, Add. MSS.* 34929.

[3] This, according to the Signal Book (1808), in which the rendezvous were printed for the first time, was No. 52, "six leagues due N.W. of Finisterre," but James says it was at this time 38 leagues N.W. (vol. iv. p. 452). The two cruisers actually met 5 or 6 leagues S.S.W. of Finisterre.

of Gardner's cruisers to replace the *Melampus* off Finisterre; and so, secure from surprise, he held on confidently where he was.

Meanwhile Kerr hurried on for Ireland. Midway across the Bay he had the luck to meet a Guernsey privateer lugger. He ordered her into Plymouth with a despatch for the Admiralty and himself carried on for Cork, communicating his news to Gardner's outlying cruisers as he passed.[1] It was a fine performance. Few features, indeed, of these wars are more striking than the resource and decision which cruiser captains showed in spreading intelligence of this nature on their own responsibility and their own grasp of the situation.

It was through Gardner that the Admiralty first got Kerr's startling news. They had it on the 25th, just a week after Craig and Knight had sailed; and on that day were issued a series of those remarkable orders which always seemed ready for any eventuality, and which can only have proceeded from the rich store of strategical tradition that was accumulated in the brain of Middleton. By that time he knew the King had approved Pitt's choice, and doubtless he was already at work.

The first thought was for the safety of the West Indies. A raid in that quarter had long been expected, and in the eyes of the Admiralty it was Villeneuve's most likely object. Indeed, for some time Pitt had had in his possession information from the famous spy, "L'Ami," that an attack on Jamaica was in contemplation, and Missiessy's voyage had already indicated the West Indies as a danger area. Consequently Cochrane's general instructions were immediately supplemented by orders that if Villeneuve's objective were found to be Jamaica he was to join Dacres at Port Royal with his whole battle squadron. This would produce a concentration of eleven of the line, of which one was a three-

[1] Kerr to Gardner, April 23: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 237.

decker, a force strong enough to hold in check Villeneuve and any Spanish ships that might have joined him from Cadiz, till such time as reinforcements should reach the station.

On this last point they had little cause for anxiety. The necessary reinforcements would probably reach him automatically. It was an old but now forgotten tradition which throws much light on Nelson's great movement, that in such an eventuality as had occurred the Commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean should send or follow with a proportion of his force large enough to make the British squadron in the threatened area superior to that of the enemy. Originally, indeed, it had been the practice to insert such a clause in the Mediterranean instructions. In 1704 Rooke was directed that if the Toulon fleet got out of the Straits his first duty would be to follow it and bring it to action. As late as 1756 Byng's instructions contained categorical orders on the point. Consequently it is no matter of surprise to find the Admiralty expecting that Nelson would act on the well-established tradition, and in this spirit supplementary orders were quickly framed for him.

He was told that Knight's two ships, which formed Craig's escort, were to proceed at once to Barbadoes, "if you have not already detached a number equal to the enemy." If he had done so, he was to order Knight's ships to join Orde, and Orde was to send them on with Craig's expedition; for, of course, if Villeneuve had gone west there was nothing for the expedition to fear except the weak Spanish squadron in Cartagena, which was reported not yet ready for sea. There was, moreover, no further need for Nelson to act as covering squadron in accordance with his orders of ten days before. "Their Lordships trust," the new orders ran, "you have had early intelligence of the sailing of the Toulon fleet, and that you have in consequence detached a number

of ships equal to that of the enemy in pursuit." What remained of his squadron he was to send to join Orde before Cadiz, he himself of course being expected home on sick leave.[1]

Two days later, however, a misgiving as to what Nelson might do led to further precautions. It was now known that he had been in position at Maddalena about the time Villeneuve sailed, and the most natural explanation of his missing him was that once more he had gone to Egypt. The fear was, so Yorke wrote to Lord Hardwicke, "his only eye is directed eastward, and we shall find ourselves in a great scrape."[2] It was decided, therefore, to take steps to reinforce the West Indies directly from Gardner's fleet in case it should prove that Nelson had gone astray. The means already existed in the Flying Squadron, which, it will be remembered, had been formed for special service under Collingwood. The only difficulty was that Gardner's fleet was not yet up to its full strength, and the detachment would weaken it seriously. But the difficulty was faced. Besides Gardner's regular reserve there were other ships available which only required crews and fitting for sea, and with pressure they could be ready in time to replace the West Indian detachment. To this end every nerve was strained and every sacrifice made. The War Office offered its help, and the Port Admirals were informed that orders had been issued for the troops of the garrisons to assist in the work. They could apply to the Generals for the men they wanted, and they were "to use every possible exertion in getting the ships ready for sea with the utmost despatch." Cruisers were freely sacrificed to the now all-important battle strength, and at every port authority was given to draw upon any frigates that were at hand to complete the complements of the ships of the line.[3]

[1] *Out-letters* (*Secret Orders*), 1363, April 25.
[2] *Hardwicke Papers*, April 30: *Add. MSS.* 35706.
[3] *Admiralty Minutes*, 152, April 27.

The Flying Squadron at this time consisted of ten of the line, and it was decided to use half of it at once. Accordingly Gardner was directed to detach Collingwood with his flagship, the *Dreadnought* 98, and four two-deckers, and to hand him sealed orders, which were to the following effect. He was to proceed with all expedition to Madeira, and without anchoring to send in for intelligence of the French fleet or of any British ships that had been seen to pass that way. If he heard for certain that seven or more of the line were in chase of the enemy, he was to return. If the intelligence was not positive, he was to carry on to Barbadoes, join Cochrane, and seek out the enemy's fleet. If he found the French had left the Leeward Islands and gone north, Cochrane was to shift his flag to a frigate and remain in charge of the station, while Collingwood was to take the whole battle squadron to Jamaica, and in concert with Dacres to defend the island and seek to bring the enemy to action. Finally he was given as usual a general discretion to act as he found best on the spot, in order to prevent an attempt on any of the British West Indian Islands.[1]

The meaning of the Madeira destination was that steps had already been taken to watch that area. More than a month previously, when the precaution of organising the Flying Squadron was on foot, means had been adopted to supply it with intelligence of any escaping squadron it might have to chase. To this end three frigates had been withdrawn from Keith and Saumarez, with orders to proceed to Madeira with all possible despatch and cruise from forty leagues south-east of it to a hundred leagues north-west. They were to hold the station a month after arriving, and if an enemy's squadron was sighted one was to come home to report and the other to shadow the enemy till his course was determined.[2]

[1] *Admiralty Minutes*, 152, April 27.

[2] *Secret Orders*, 1363, March 6. Saumarez sent *Cerberus* on March 27. (See *post*, p. 330 n.) Keith sent *Melpomene* and *Immortalité*.

On the same day that Collingwood's orders were issued, corresponding instructions went forward for Nelson. He was informed that if he had made no detachment Collingwood would follow Knight's two ships to Barbadoes. As the effect of this would be to bring the squadron in the West Indies up to eighteen of the line with two or three three-deckers, nothing further would be required from Nelson. He was therefore to leave four of his squadron with Orde and bring home the rest, after making due provision for opposing any force the enemy had left in the Mediterranean. At the same time Gardner was told to send down a cruiser to get intelligence of Villeneuve's movements from Orde and carry it on to Madeira to meet Collingwood.[1]

It will be seen that up to this time the Admiralty had little doubt that Villeneuve was bound on the original mission which Napoleon had given him and of which they had had intelligence. As yet there is no hint that any apprehension of his sudden return to the Channel was felt at headquarters, or that Sir James Craig's expedition was in serious danger. The prevailing impression was that the objective of the Toulon fleet was Jamaica. It appeared that Nelson's resolute retention of his primary position had forced Napoleon to play into Pitt's hands. Denied all chance of operating within the Straits, Villeneuve had been driven to secondary colonial ventures and had left the Mediterranean free for the intended action in concert with Russia. No sooner, however, had the orders for the West Indies been issued, on this appreciation of the position, than it was all upset. By April 30th Gardner had sent in the letters he had received from Orde. Picture for a moment what they meant at headquarters. Nelson was no one knew where. The best information they had was Strachan's opinion that he had been thrown off the scent, and was almost certainly on his way to Egypt. Orde,

[1] *Secret Orders*, 1363, April 27.

moreover, without having ascertained anything more of Villeneuve's movements than that he had appeared at Cadiz, was quitting his station. Neither Admiral, therefore, would receive his orders for Craig's security, and both covering squadrons at the critical period were out of position. Whither Villeneuve was bound Orde could not tell. He might go north, he might go south, but, as we have seen, his carefully argued appreciation inclined him to think that the destination was westward with a view to doubling back to the Channel.

So far as is known, no one up to this time had seriously suggested such a probability, but from this moment at least it was never lost sight of. Still, knowing what Pitt did, it was quite as likely that Villeneuve's orders were to hold the approaches to the Straits and destroy Craig and Knight. They and their fifty transports, to say nothing of the convoys, were obviously in the direst danger of annihilation, and what such a shock would mean to the great Coalition in the crisis of parturition was too distressing to contemplate. The Government could scarcely flatter themselves that Napoleon had no suspicion of what was in the wind, for Craig's expedition did not stand alone. At Cork there was another similar one assembling under Sir Eyre Coote, which appears to have been intended for the security of India. The two together could scarcely escape French attention, and as a matter of fact, although Napoleon had not yet divined Craig's instructions, he had already an uneasy eye on the British military movements. Talleyrand's smooth pen had been presenting them to him as of no importance, except as evidence of the desperate political position of Pitt's Government. News had reached the French Foreign Office that at Lisbon they were in alarm lest the Tagus was the objective of the mysterious expeditions—a fear which Talleyrand regarded as somewhat extravagant. "Still," he said, "there is no project, how-

ever absurd, which we can safely reject as impossible in the existing state of opinion in England and the embarrassment of the Cabinet. If they must have an expedition its objective matters little to the real motive for undertaking it; and if, as is possible, all that is wanted is a display of enterprise, it is still more indifferent whether it is destined for Portugal or the North, or for the Levant or the Indies."[1]

Napoleon himself took the matter more seriously. Affecting to believe a vague rumour that Missiessy had taken Dominica and St. Lucia, he was persuading himself and his servants after his manner that his original mistake in getting the Rochefort squadron entangled in the West Indies was a stroke of genius. By throwing British strategy into confusion and diverting attention to distant colonies it was paving the way for invasion. The British expeditions served well to support his attitude, but reading between the lines of his correspondence we may well doubt if this was his real view of the enemy's new activity. Three days after receiving Talleyrand's news he wrote a memorandum upon it for Cambacérès, Arch-Chancellor of the Empire, whom he had left in Paris at his brother Joseph's side as the real head of affairs during his absence in Italy. This despatch breathes a different note. "It seems," he wrote, "that two expeditions of from 5000 to 6000 men each have left or are preparing to leave, one for the Great Indies and the other for the West Indies. They are neither militia nor volunteers they are sending: they are their best troops." The fact that the threat of invasion no longer availed to contain the flower of the British army in England clearly was unexpected and annoying. "If then," he continued, "our flotilla receives the signal and is favoured by six hours of fair wind, of fog, and

[1] Bertrand, *Lettres inédites de Talleyrand à Napoleon*, 1800–9, p. 118: Lyons, April 10.

of night, the English will be surprised and find themselves stripped of their best troops."[1]

This certainly was not what he really thought. Nothing is clearer amidst Napoleon's shifting plans than that at this time he had absolutely abandoned as a hopeless military operation the project of a surprise invasion by the flotilla alone. He may have believed it possible once, and popular opinion in England had believed it too. Now both knew better. The naval view had been accepted, and Napoleon's words can mean nothing but annoyance to find that his threat would work no longer. His self-esteem was sick, and after his manner he was treating it with a gentle course of self-deception. He persuaded himself he had fixed England's anxiety on her East and West Indian colonies, as he explained this same day to General Pino, his Minister of War in Italy. Pino had apparently been expressing anxiety about British action in the Mediterranean, but Napoleon assured him there was now no fear of England's assisting Austria except with money. His threat on India, he said, was forcing the British Government to send Lord Cornwallis thither with several regiments, and they had also found it necessary to despatch eight or ten thousand men to secure Jamaica.[2]

Such at least was the rosy picture he chose to paint, as he was about to cross the Alps in quest of his new crown. How much he really believed it is impossible to tell. All we can say with any certainty is that he was beginning to feel the irritation of Pitt's pin-prick. Probably he still believed the initiative was his, and had no suspicion as yet that an insidious process of wresting it from him had begun. It was of course too much for Pitt to flatter himself he had so well deceived the master of deception, and for him Villeneuve's appearance in the Straits' mouth must mean,

[1] To Cambacérès, Lyons, April 13th: *Correspondance*, x. 315.
[2] *Correspondance*, p. 317.

first of all, that Napoleon was awake and after his manner was springing to meet the blow before it could fall. If it did not mean this, there was still Orde's suggestion, that he was bent after all on attempting the invasion, and attempting it under cover of a great naval concentration.

In a moment, then, the whole atmosphere at home was changed. It throbbed with high tension. We can feel the tremors still as we handle the papers which the crisis produced. Even Pitt was disturbed. He had spent the whole day on which the news arrived—that is, April 29th—in the House of Commons. There had been an exhausting and more than usually acrimonious wrangle over the Eleventh Report of the Navy Commission. In the course of it Pitt had announced Middleton's appointment, and had been brutally accused by Fox of trying to burke the inquiry into his friend's conduct. In the heat that was engendered a motion was made for the institution of criminal proceedings against Melville, and nearly all the leaders of the Opposition, regardless of the danger of the nation, ruthlessly tormented the Prime Minister by supporting it. It was a fierce struggle, but in spite of their acrimony, Pitt secured its rejection. Overwrought with the defence of his friend, he reached home at two o'clock in the morning to find Orde's news from the coast of Spain awaiting him. There was also a report from his Paris agent saying that the Toulon fleet was about to sail, that its destination was a mystery, but it was generally believed to be Ireland. The spy himself had reasons, he said, to believe it was intended for Jamaica, but in a second report, dated April 17th, he had assured Pitt the whole system of Napoleon was now directed to diverting the British Navy from his real attack.[1] The intelligence could only confirm Orde's view that a sudden concentration on the Channel

[1] "Secret Intelligence from Paris," March 29th, April 17th: *Admiralty In-letters* (*Secretary of State*), 4198, April 30th.

was in the wind. Pitt could not go to bed, and at half-past two he sat down to give the alarm to his new First Lord.

"On returning from the House," he wrote, "I have just found these papers; they are of the most pressing importance. I will not go to bed for a few hours, but will be ready to see you as soon as you please, as I think we must not lose a moment in taking measures to set afloat every ship that by any means of extraordinary exertion we can find means to man. At such an emergency, I am inclined to think many measures may be taken to obtain a supply of men for the time, which would not be applicable to any case less immediately urgent."[1]

Barham had spent his first day of office in preparing to set on foot a reorganisation of the Admiralty in order to fit the distribution of work to the condition of the First Lord's being a sailor and responsible for the actual direction of the maritime war.[2] Perhaps he too was sitting up all night. At all events in the course of the next day, April 30th, a whole series of characteristically lucid orders were issued, which tell of acute tension and prolonged hours of labour. Those issued to the Admirals afloat are devoted primarily to saving Craig's expedition, in the second place to maintaining the blockade of Ferrol, and ultimately to the traditional closing in on the mouth of the Channel in case Orde's appreciation should prove correct.

To Calder went orders to retain Knight and his two ships, instead of sending them to the West Indies, if the imperilled expedition had come in touch with him. Craig and his transports he was to send back to Plymouth or

[1] Sir John Barrow, *Autobiographical Memoirs*, p. 264.

[2] *Admiralty Minutes*, 256, April 25th. This was a minute requiring Marsden the Secretary to furnish him with a detailed memorandum on the organisation and Staff of the Admiralty, and the distribution and course of work. The reorganisation Barham founded on it will be dealt with later. See *post*, p. 94.

Cork under cruiser escort. Knight on his part was informed that the need of the moment was to reinforce the Ferrol squadron in view of the possibility of Villeneuve's intending to break the blockade. If, therefore, he received the fresh orders before he had passed St. Vincent with the convoy, he was to bring it back to Ferrol, and follow Calder's orders as above. If Calder was not there, he was to carry on and close on Gardner off Ushant. If, on the other hand, he had passed St. Vincent, and ascertained that Villeneuve had left Cadiz, he was to shift his flag to a frigate, send his two ships of the line to close on Calder or Gardner as before, and carry on with the convoy up the Straits under cruiser escort.

As for Orde, his instructions were to leave his cruisers to watch Cadiz, and join Calder immediately with his battle squadron. He would then be in command of both squadrons, but was to consider himself under Gardner's orders. This meant, of course, that the blockade of Cadiz was abandoned, and the new "Coast of Spain" Squadron reabsorbed into the old Western Squadron. It was explained to Orde that the object of the new disposition was, if possible, to maintain the blockade of Ferrol. Otherwise everything was to concentrate at the mouth of the Channel. If, therefore, it was found that Calder had already fallen back, Orde too was to close on Ushant. Assuming, however, that he and Calder were able to join hands on the Ferrol station the blockade was to be continued, but subject to this proviso. If they had reason to believe that a combined French and Spanish fleet was coming to Ferrol "under circumstances in which you may not think you can advantageously engage them," then they were to fall back together on Gardner at Ushant. Finally Gardner was directed to order Calder to close on him if the combined fleet were reported to be coming north.[1] If now we

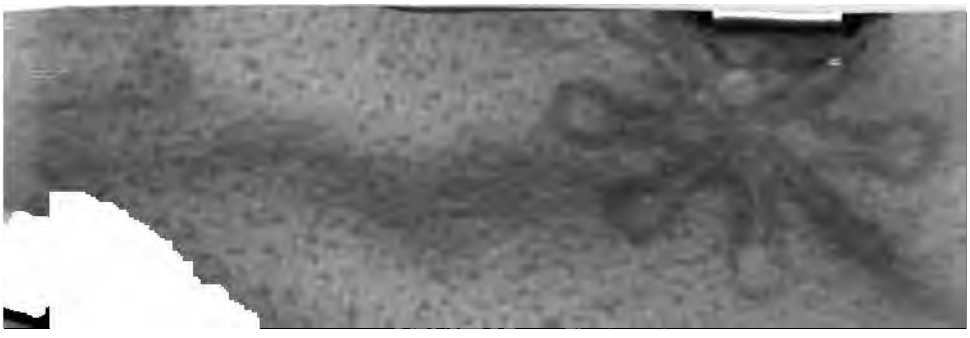
[1] *Out-letters* (*Secret Orders*), 1363, April 30th.

compare these orders with what Orde was doing, it will be seen that he was anticipating the intentions of the Admiralty exactly. Both he and they were following the well-known tradition, whereby it was secured that all disturbances of our strategical distribution only produced, as it were automatically, an overwhelming concentration at the vital time and place. Boldly as the fleet was spread, it retained in the alert instinct of its squadronal commanders a reflex power of shrinking back to the centre when any rough touch gave warning that dispersal was no longer wise. Orde acted on that instinct, and his action was approved by Barham. It were well to remember this before endorsing Nelson's hasty castigations—well also to remember that Nelson never repeated them when he knew the facts.

In harmony with these instructions to the outlying squadrons, increased efforts were made to reinforce the central division of the Western Squadron. The *Prince George*, a three-decker, was ordered to join it immediately. Admiral Rowley was sent down to Chatham to press forward two new seventy-fours that were just completing, and orders went out to hire six or eight fast vessels as despatch boats.[1]

The underlying ideas of the whole group of orders is not far to seek. We have been attempting, they say, to pass a military force over uncommanded seas—seas, that is, in which no decision has taken place; our chain of covering squadrons has been broken through: therefore the expedition must be withdrawn, unless it has already passed the danger point. If, however, the enemy's movement is found not to be aimed at the expedition, we must assume it is aimed at the point of greatest danger, and we must make sure of the mouth of the Channel, the old focal point of British strategy.

[1] *Admiralty Minutes*, 153, May 1st.



It was this sure hold of British naval opinion on the unbroken tradition that was to render Napoleon's invasion as impossible as all the attempts of his predecessors. "Unhappily," says Colonel Desbrière, in speaking of the discredited French belief in a surprise of the Channel, "the English had long got wind of this danger, and convinced of its gravity had given a standing order, thanks to which the entrance of the Channel was fated to be held in crushing force. All the Napoleonic plans could only dash themselves to pieces against this primordial device so imperturbably followed."[1]

So it was that Barham began his memorable nine months' administration; but amidst all the strain and stress he found time to give to the Admiralty, out of the depth of his long experience, the organisation for war by which every call was to be met so brilliantly up to the day of final triumph. We cannot do better than attempt to grasp his system before proceeding further.

For himself he reserved no special function. "The First Lord," says his Memorandum, "will take upon himself the general superintendence and arrangement of the whole."

"The senior or first professional lord," it continued—and this was Gambier—"will do the same when the First Lord is absent. His duty will be also to attend to the correspondence of the day, but more particularly that of the ports, and all secret services"—that is, he had control of orders to naval bases and intelligence. "He will minute all such orders and letters as may come within his department and he may see necessary, and deliver the same to the Secretary to be acted upon."

His special sphere of action is then detailed. "He will, with the approbation of the First Lord, dispose of the movements of all ships on Home and Foreign stations, and

[1] *Trafalgar*, p. 8.

give orders to the Admirals, Captains, and Commanding Officers of ships on service. He will distribute the seamen and marines. . . . He will attend particularly to the equipment of all ships and vessels of every description." His duties in relation to supply were thus confined to the fitting out of vessels already commissioned for active service which were thereby brought into his department. He was also charged with seeing that his orders had been obeyed by comparing them with ships' journals. Lastly he was "to take account of all promotions," but the First Lord was to sign the commissions.

Supply generally was in the hands of the "Second Professional Lord," who, so the Memorandum directs, "will receive from the Secretary (after they are read)"—that is, read to the Board at its daily sitting—"all letters and papers belonging to the Navy Board, the Transport Board, the Board of Sick and Hurt and Greenwich Hospital."

The duty of the Third Professional Lord was to superintend the appointment of all commissioned and warrant officers "under the inspection of the First Lord" and to keep all vessels complete with them. Vacancies for Captains and Lieutenants were to be "stated to the First Lord."

"The Civil Lords," so the paper concludes, "in order to keep the Professional Lords uninterrupted in the various important duties committed to their charge, will sign all orders, protections, warrants, and promiscuous papers daily issuing from the office. They will also assist the Board with their advice." [1]

In working this system Barham seems to have treated his colleagues as a staff under him—the First Sea Lord discharging approximately the duties of his Chief of the Staff, directing war movements but also seeing the material

[1] *Admiralty Minutes*, 256. The memo. is signed and corrected in Barham's hand and dated "May."—Printed in *Barham Papers*, iii. 76.

fit for service so far as regarded equipping and manning ships; the Second Sea Lord controlling the supply of material; and the Third, the higher personnel. Barham himself, so Barrow tells us, never sat on the Board. He seems to have concerned himself only with the larger movements of the campaign. "Lord Barham," he says, "at the advanced period of his life was satisfied to let things go on in their usual course, to remain quiet in his room, to make few enquiries and to let the Board consider and settle the current affairs of the Navy amongst themselves. In fact he never attended the Board; but when any doubtful question arose one of the Lords or the Secretaries took his decision on it in his own room." [1]

The impression which the passage gives is that Barham lived in Barrow's memory as little more than a figure-head. But it must have been also in his own room that he pondered over the shifting strategical exigencies of the campaign, anticipating each one as it arose, and having always ready in his mind the necessary orders for squadrons at sea. They are all preserved in the series of "Secret Orders," and all of them that deal with the main movements of the war-plan bear his signature. With "the current affairs of the Navy," as Barrow says, he did not concern himself. The higher direction of the war was one man's uninterrupted work.

[1] *Autobiographical Memoirs*, p. 277. Barrow was a member of the Board, having been appointed Second Secretary by Lord Melville in May 1804. He did not write the *Memoirs*, however, till he was quite an old man, after forty years' service at the Admiralty. His memory failed him at times in matters of detail, but otherwise the book seems trustworthy. The Second Sea Lord was Vice-Admiral Philip Patton, a man who had made a special study of the personnel of the Navy and had foretold the great mutinies. The Third Sea Lord was Captain Lord Garlies. Besides the two Secretaries there were three Civil Lords, including two former Secretaries of exceptional ability and experience. One was the veteran Sir Philip Stephens, who had begun his official life as Lord Anson's secretary, and had been Admiralty Secretary from 1763 to 1795; the other Sir Evan Nepean, a Navy clerk, who, after serving as Under-Secretary successively at the Foreign and War Offices, had succeeded Stephens at the Admiralty until 1804.—(Sir J. K. Laughton in *Dictionary of Nat. Biog.*)

To this he devoted himself with a singleness of purpose which set all etiquette at defiance. In the *Barham Papers* there is a long "Communication to the King" on the naval situation in September 1805, which begins with an apology for his not going to court. Owing to having, as he says, two Boards to superintend, meaning presumably the Board of Admiralty and the Navy Board, he cannot wait upon the King in person. In November there is another addressed to Pitt for submission to the Cabinet, which concludes with a hope that the indulgence he had been permitted in not being required to attend its meetings would be continued except for business connected with the fleet.[1] There is nothing extant which can throw doubt on Barrow's assertion that he never sat upon the Board. His practice seems to have been, where war direction was concerned, to draft the strategical orders with his own hand, and to send the draft down to two or more of his naval colleagues for their formal approval and signature. In the truest sense he was the real director of the naval war, but in his eyes his functions as such did not exclude the control of the larger questions of material. For all his concentration of effort, he maintained, according to the old British tradition, a close watch on the Supply department—that is, he continued to control the Navy Board while exercising the functions of a Chief of the Naval Staff to Pitt, as the War Minister.

[1] See *Barham Papers*, iii. pp. 98 and 108. On August 3 in a letter to Pitt concerning the deficiency of men for the fleet he says: "The charge I have taken upon me is, I own, a heavy one, and the service so increased in every point of view as to bear no comparison with former times. I seldom have the pen out of my hand from 8 in the morning till 6 at night; and although I see no person but on public business, yet I don't find my day finished at that time. . . . This labour is very much increased from a want of men," &c.—*Ibid.*, p. 95.

CHAPTER VI

NELSON'S DILEMMA

DURING all this time of tension not a word came of Nelson. So far as headquarters was concerned he had disappeared as completely and as mysteriously as Villeneuve, and there was nothing to throw doubt on Sir Richard Strachan's conjecture that he had gone again to Egypt. It was not so. For him, as we have seen, there was only one solution, and that only a partial solution, of the uncertainties of the problem. It was, not to go to the eastward of Sicily nor to the westward of Sardinia, until he knew something positive. Fixed in this determination he had taken up his position at Ustica off Palermo, and there he had to wait two days before he had anything on which he could act.

By April 10th a rumour had already reached him that a British military expedition was on its way to the Mediterranean. That so great a complication was to be added to his embarrassment without a word of warning was past bearing and almost beyond belief, and at his wits' end he was seeking relief, after his wont, in a letter to his friend Ball. "I can hardly suppose," he wrote early in the morning, "that any expedition would be sent to this country without my having some intimation, and I have not the most distant idea of such a thing. If they are sent, they will be taken; for the French know everything which passes in England. However I can do no more than I have done; for I am sorely vexed at the ignorance in which I have been kept." At this point he was interrupted by one of his

captains coming on board, and when he sat down again to finish his letter the blow had fallen. "Hallowell," he continued, "is just arrived from Palermo. He brings accounts that the great expedition is sailed, and that seven Russian sail of the line are expected in the Mediterranean: therefore I may suppose the French fleet are bound to the westward. I must do my best. God bless you. I am very very miserable."

And well he might be. The stroke he had prayed and longed for through the weary months of his vigil was about to be played, and played apparently so badly that disaster seemed inevitable. He could not doubt, any more than the rest, that Villeneuve's objective was the doomed expedition. Why had he not been warned? He could not tell that the warning had been sent the moment the convention with Russia had been signed, and that it was still far from reaching him.[1] All he could know was that his whole plan of action was upset by a new factor. The position he had taken up would no longer meet the case. When he began his letter to Ball he had made up his mind "to stand towards Madelena and Cape Corse," apparently with the intention of ascertaining whether Villeneuve had doubled back, since from all his widely scattered cruisers came not a word of the lost fleet. But now the point of greatest danger had shifted to the mouth of the Straits, and without a moment's hesitation he resolved to move westward with all speed.

His idea was not to proceed direct to Gibraltar; for he now issued a "secret route," in which the first rendezvous was the south end of Sardinia (No. 71) and the second Formentera, the southernmost of the Balearic Islands.[2] The

[1] Craig's orders with instructions to co-operate were contained in a despatch to Nelson, dated March 27th (*Out-letters, Secret Orders*, 1363), but there is no trace in his correspondence with the Admiralty of his having received it till May 1st (*post*, p. 107). It was not until April 15th that he received the Admiralty bag of February 16th.—Nicolas, vi. 404.

[2] *Journal*, April 10 and 16. In the revised list of rendezvous used in September, No. 71 was Tarifa, No. 80 was Formentera west end.

route would suggest that, in spite of his anxiety for Craig's force, his object was still to make sure that Villeneuve had not doubled back upon Naples, and his subsequent actions confirm the supposition that something of the kind was in his mind.

Bitter as was the cup of his dilemma it was not yet full. In spite of every effort and the splendid seamanship of his hardened squadron, he could scarcely make any progress to the westward at all. Persistent heavy weather from the west and north-west held him fast inside Sardinia. On the 11th he was no farther towards Formentera than the Island of Marittimo off the end of Sicily. Next day, full of his old doubt, he sent two more cruisers to look into Toulon, one to go inside Sardinia and the other round Toro. By the 15th, after four days' struggle, he was still beating round the south end of Sardinia, and here he was joined by two cruisers from Naples. One was a frigate of his own, the *Amazon*, which he had sent in for news, and the other the *Decade*, a smart frigate which had just made the voyage from England in seventeen days. She had brought out Colonel Smith, one of Lord Mulgrave's private secretaries, who had been sent specially to Elliot with news of the expedition and his secret instructions for its employment. Elliot had hurried her on to Nelson at the earliest moment, but her information was already nearly a week old.[1] "Lord Mulgrave," Elliot wrote, "informs me in great secrecy that a considerable body of troops was on the point of sailing for Malta, for the purposes with which you have been so long acquainted. Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, Lord Mulgrave's private secretary, who has brought me secret instructions upon this head, conceives that the regiments will have

[1] Phillimore, *Life of Sir William Parker*, i. 281. The *Decade* had reached Naples by the 9th. She must therefore have left England on March 22nd or 23rd, that is, three or four days before the 27th, the day on which Nelson's instructions to co-operate with Craig were issued. See also Nicolas, vi. 406 n.

left England a few days after the departure of the *Decade*. Under this impression I think it highly material that you should not be ignorant of a circumstance, which, if known to the French, may have some weight with them respecting the destination of the Toulon fleet."[1]

To imagine Nelson's feelings on reading such a letter is not difficult. If Colonel Smith's surmise was correct, if the troops had really sailed before the end of March, it made matters ten times worse and the silence of the Admiralty ten times more exasperating. "Your Excellency's notice," Nelson wrote in indignant reply, "about troops being sent to the Mediterranean is the first word I have ever heard of it, nor have I an idea that any such thing could be in agitation without the Admiralty telling me, in order that I might meet and protect them." Had he been aware of the agitation at the Admiralty over Melville's downfall, he would have understood better, but of that he knew nothing to temper his anger. "Does your Excellency mean," he went on, "that *you* or that *I* have been long acquainted with it? If it is *you*, I dare say it is right; but if *I* am meant as being in the secret of the destination of those troops, I most solemnly declare my entire ignorance as to the force or destination, or even that *one* soldier is intended for the Mediterranean. I know certainly where many thousands are wanted; but, as I said before, I never will believe that any number of troops will be risked inside Gibraltar without an assurance of my protection: and that I should be directed to meet them upon some fixed station to the westward of Toulon, if not to the westward of Cartagena."

He was not to know the expedition was still windbound at Spithead as he wrote, or that instructions such as he sketched were just starting from the Admiralty. For all

[1] Nicolas, vi. 406 *n*. The letter is dated April 9th, the same day the *Decade* arrived. She had been therefore nearly six days beating out to Nelson.

he could tell the troops were already a fortnight out; and before he closed his letter—at midday—came news from a neutral just spoken that, nine days before, the Toulon squadron had been seen off Cape Gata bearing for the Straits before an easterly wind. "If this account is true," Nelson ended in despair, "much mischief may be apprehended. It kills me, the very thought." [1]

The acuteness of the danger seems almost to have thrown him off his balance. Yet even so he still held unshaken to the line he had followed all along. He was resolved that even the apparent certainty of the new danger should not beguile him to the westward till he had made absolutely sure the ground was good behind him. Accordingly he sent off yet another cruiser to look into Toulon, with orders to meet him at Formentera, the rendezvous to which he still held. She also bore a letter to the cruiser he had kept off Cape San Sebastian in the north-east of Spain, whom she was to relieve. "I am going," was his message, "to ascertain if the French fleet is not in Toulon and then to proceed to the westward, and this is all I can tell at present." [2]

It was not till two days later that his way was made plain before him and he knew he had been completely outmanœuvred. He had just left Toro when away to windward Captain William Parker of the *Amazon* telegraphed that he had spoken a Ragusan who said she had seen the Toulon squadron passing the Straits on April 8th, ten days since. And to add to the vexation he reported that the homeward-bound Levant convoy, which had already been caught once and which Strachan had been sent to protect, had left Gibraltar only a day ahead.[3]

[1] Nicolas, iv. 406.

[2] Nelson to Thomas, H.M. Bomb *Ætna*, April 16th: Nicolas, vi. 404; and *Nelson's Journal*, April 16th.

[3] Phillimore, *Life of Sir William Parker*, vol. i. 284. Parker to Nelson, April 18th: *Nelson Papers, Add. MSS.* 34929, f. 170.

Stunned and humbled by the news, Nelson changed the rendezvous to Rosia Bay (Gibraltar) and sat down to rearrange his plans. "I am going out of the Mediterranean after the French fleet," he wrote to Elliot in a tone of resignation in sharp contrast with his last indignant letter. "It may be thought that I have protected too well Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, the Morea, and Egypt from the French, but I feel I have done right, and am therefore easy about any fate that may await me for having missed the French fleet." So his pen wrote the words, but they are the words of a man who was neither sure nor easy. Next he began an apology to the Admiralty for his failure. "Under the severe affliction," he said, "which I feel at the escape of the French fleet out of the Mediterranean, I hope that their Lordships will not impute it to any want of due attention on my part, but on the contrary that by my vigilance the enemy found it was impossible to undertake any expedition in the Mediterranean." That had been his chief function, as he saw his duty, but would the Admiralty and the country understand?

As yet he could not see clearly what the ultimate destination of his fleet should be. He merely informed them he was going to the westward and must be guided by what he heard when he reached Gibraltar, and that meanwhile he was taking precautions to preserve the command of the Italian seas during his absence.

For this purpose he formed the greater part of his cruisers into a squadron under the command of Captain Hon. T. Bladen Capel, of the *Phœbe* 36, with instructions to take station off Toro and between that island and Marittimo off the west end of Sicily, "for the purpose of intercepting any expedition which the enemy may attempt against Sardinia, Sicily, and Egypt." "I only mention it," Nelson wrote, "as the most likely place to fall in with any expedition which the enemy may attempt against those

places from Toulon, but must leave this important trust to your judgment and to act, as from certain circumstances of information you shall judge best, to prevent their effecting a landing." The squadron, when it was concentrated as intended at Toro, would consist of five frigates and a bomb, and this force, with the Neapolitan squadron and the *Excellent* at Naples, he considered sufficient for the moment without counting on the arrival of the Russians.[1]

So to the last he clung to the base idea of his strategical principle. His dominant function was to keep command of the Mediterranean. For him that was always the end; the destruction of the Toulon fleet was only a means. To that end, therefore, he sacrificed more than half his cruisers—keeping only three frigates and a couple of sloops with his flag; and not even in the moment of his passionate desire to deal with the enemy's battle fleet, when cruisers meant almost everything, did he suffer it to turn him a hair-breadth from the higher purpose. No great captain ever grasped more fully the strategical importance of dealing with the enemy's main force, yet no one ever less suffered it to become an obsession; no one saw more clearly when it ceased to be the key of a situation, and fell to a position of secondary moment.

For a real insight into Nelson's character as a strategist there is nothing in his career so valuable as the period of trial that was now before him. At no other time are we permitted to see so deep down into the well-laid foundations on which his brilliant combinations were securely based. The dramatic attraction of his immortal chase has led to the growth of a legend that it was a stroke of inspired daring. But in truth it was a sober calculation patiently built up step by step with all behind made solid and secure and all in front reduced by slow degrees to such certainty as war ever permits. As a precedent for conduct in such a

[1] Nelson to Capel, April 18th: Nicolas, vi. 408.

case there is nothing within our knowledge that can compare with the forging of the final decision—nothing that so fully reveals the working of a master mind in war. It must be followed day by day, even hour by hour where possible.

The day after he received Parker's report he was still only ten leagues west of Toro, but he had recovered himself and his purpose was settled. "Dead foul—dead foul," he wrote again to Ball, "but my mind is fully made up what to do when I leave the Straits, supposing there is no certain information of the enemy's destination. . . . I believe this ill-luck will go near to kill me, but as these are times for exertions, I must not be cast down whatever I feel." And again to Lord Melville, whom he believed still to be his chief, "I am not made to despair—what man can do shall be done. I have marked out for myself a decided line of conduct and I shall follow it up well."

It has often been assumed that this line was to make straight for the West Indies on an intuition that Villeneuve was gone there; but the rest of the correspondence shows it was quite the reverse. At a loss to locate his enemy and sure now that he had left the Mediterranean, he had resolved if he got no further information to play the old safe game which Orde had played, and which to the experienced Admirals of those days was a second nature—a golden rule when in doubt. So far was he from any determination to proceed to the West Indies that he had resolved to close on the Western Squadron at the mouth of the Channel.

In the course of the day Parker found the brig which Lord Mark Kerr had hired, and she brought an important new light. Not only was she able to bring Kerr's message that Villeneuve had passed the Straits ten days before, but she also carried later news that he had been to Cadiz and left again with some Spanish ships in company.[1] Nelson

[1] Phillimore, *Sir William Parker*, i. 284.

at once deduced that Villeneuve had not gone to the West Indies, and sat down to draw up the following appreciation for the Admiralty:—

"The enemy's fleet having so very long ago passed the Straits and formed a junction with some Spanish ships from Cadiz. . . . I have detached the *Amazon* to Lisbon for information, and I am proceeding off Cape St. Vincent as expeditiously as possible; and I hope the *Amazon* will join me there or that I shall obtain some positive information of the destination of the enemy. The circumstance of their having taken the Spanish ships, which were for sea, from Cadiz, satisfies my mind that they are not bound for the West Indies: but intend forming a junction with the squadron at Ferrol and pushing direct for Ireland or Brest, as I believe the French have troops on board. Therefore, if I receive no intelligence to do away with my present belief, I shall proceed from Cape St. Vincent, and take my position fifty leagues west from Scilly, approaching that island slowly, that I may not miss any vessels sent in search of the squadron with orders. My reason for this position is, that it is equally easy either to get to the fleet off Brest or to go to Ireland should the fleet be wanted at either station. I trust this plan will meet their lordships' approbation; and I have the pleasure to say that I shall bring with me eleven as fine ships of war, as ably commanded, and in as perfect order and in health as ever went to sea. . . . (*P.S.*) I shall send to both Ireland and the Channel Fleet an extract of this letter, acquainting the Commander-in-chief where to find me."

Once more, then, he was as clear-headed as ever, and eliminating minor matters was able to detach with precision the essential move. His spirit too was healed, and his letter to Lord Gardner rings with the old cheery note. He began to see, as indeed it proved, that his driving Ville-

neuve through the Straits was a strategical success, and he had little fear for what he would do outside. "My dear lord," he wrote, "if the Toulon fleet with that of Cadiz is gone your road, the ships under my command will be no unacceptable sight. If you do not want help, tell us to go back again. I feel vexed at their slipping out of the Mediterranean as I had marked them for my game. However I hope, my dear lord, that now you will annihilate them." From this time, moreover, there is no further sign of anxiety for the safety of Craig's expedition. The news of Villeneuve's having been to Cadiz to form a junction with the Spaniards must have assured him that the enemy had some other and higher aim.

A week of weary beating to the westward followed, but it brought no change in his view. At the end of it, in a letter to the Commissioner at Gibraltar, he expressed himself as unshaken in his conviction that the junction of the two squadrons indicated the relief of Ferrol, to be followed by a direct attack on the British islands, and not an adventure in the West Indies.[1] He was then nearing the Straits, and with his letter he sent the *Decade* forward to Gibraltar with directions to bring him the last word known there. Four days later, on May 1st, with Ceuta just in sight, he received a direct communication from the Admiralty which not only explained their silence on the subject of the expedition, but gave him hope it was safe. "I have this moment received your letter of the 1st of April," he immediately replied, "acquainting me . . . that Rear-Admiral Knight with the *Queen* and *Dragon* were to sail in a day or two . . . having under convoy transports with 5000 troops on board." It was the long-expected despatch directing him to take up a covering position. His relief was great, for now he knew the troops had not started so soon as Elliot believed. There was good ground to

[1] Nelson to Otway, April 26th: Nicolas, vi. 415.

hope, as he said, that as the *Fisgard* had left for England two hours after the French had passed, she would have arrived in time to stop the expedition sailing.[1]

On the 4th, as the wind still held ahead, he resolved to anchor in Tetuan Bay and employ the time in filling up with water, beef, and fuel. While thus engaged he received the first suggestion of what was really happening. It was a reply from Captain Otway, the Navy Commissioner at Gibraltar, telling him of the entire disappearance of the Combined Squadron and of the general belief that it had gone to the West Indies. The news certainly shook his former conviction, but though it filled him with new anxiety it was not enough to change his purpose. Of the sure intelligence he had hoped to get from Orde's cruisers there was none, and no matter how pressing was the danger in the west, he would not act on mere rumours. "I cannot very properly run to the West Indies," he replied to Otway, "without something beyond mere surmise, and if I defer my departure Jamaica may be lost."

His attitude to the dilemma was well expressed by his first biographers in a noteworthy passage. One of them, McArthur, knew him well and had come near to being his secretary. The legend of a heaven-sent inspiration was already arising when they wrote, and in their view it should be nipped in the bud as fraught with danger. "It was entirely inconsistent," they declare, "with Lord Nelson's great professional character and regard for the discipline of the service to take so bold a step until he had every reason to believe they could not have sailed in any other direction. . . . It is the more necessary to make this remark lest other officers, led on by the impulse of zeal unsubdued by the reflection he employed and the splendour of resolute pursuit, may erroneously indulge in a contrary idea to their own destruction."[2]

[1] To Marsden, May 1st: Nicolas, vi. 418.
[2] Clarke and McArthur, *Life of Nelson*, II. Part, iii. 94.

His whole conduct at this juncture amply bears out his biographers' remarks. The West Indies became a probable destination, that was all. Till there could be no room for doubt he kept an open mind, still resolved to close on the strategic centre, if no sufficient information were forthcoming. But meanwhile he prepared everything for the possible eventuality. On May the 5th he formally constituted his second-in-command, Sir Richard Bickerton, Commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean during his possible absence, with orders to carry out in every particular "the Admiralty instructions for the protection and safety of their Sicilian and their Sardinian Majesties' dominions, as well as preventing the enemy from effecting any expedition against Egypt." The squadron he would have for the work must at first be weak enough. Bickerton's flag was flying in the *Royal Sovereign*, but she was a first-rate and too valuable to be spared. Nelson meant to take her with him and intended Bickerton to shift his flag to any other ship he chose in the squadron that was to be left under his command. It was to consist of nearly the whole of Nelson's cruisers and any additional force that might arrive from home. There were over a score all told, and Nelson himself kept only four, so careful was he to make good behind him the ground committed to his charge.

As these orders were being prepared the wind at last came fair, and he moved for the Straits to pass on and meet the *Amazon* from Lisbon whence alone he could hope to get the light which would clear the fog. Lisbon for the moment was the centre of information, and there, while Nelson moves west on the fitful Levanter, we must look before the position can be grasped in all its bearings.

CHAPTER VII

HOW NELSON MADE SURE

On the Tagus was being played one of the many underplots of Napoleon's vast contest with Pitt. All through the long imperial struggle between England and France, Lisbon, the womb of the Oceanic expansion of Europe, had been recognised as a point beyond price. Napoleon, like all his predecessors, was resolved not only that Portugal must not be a British ally, but that even neutrality must be denied her. Following the precedents of the old Family Compact, it was a term of his convention with Spain that Portugal must be forced at least to close her ports to British vessels; and towards the end of February he had sent off General Junot, his aide-de-camp and Colonel-General of his Hussars, as ambassador to Lisbon to see that it was done. Junot was long on the road, for he had first to visit Madrid to stir the Spanish Government to greater naval activity, and not till the second week in April did he finally set out for Lisbon.

It was an evil moment. Our minister there, Lord Robert FitzGerald, was bracing himself for the coming diplomatic struggle, when on April 13th he received Orde's letters to say he had been driven off his station by Villeneuve. On the morrow Junot arrived, and FitzGerald could not doubt that in a day or two he would see the Toulon squadron in the Tagus and that Portugal would be forced into the Napoleonic system while he stood by helpless. "The junction of the French and Spanish fleets at Cadiz," he wrote home, "will now enable the ambassadors of both

nations to hold what language they please here." There was no means of resistance. The Portuguese, it is true, were making an effort to restore their navy and had already secured the services of a British officer, Rear-Admiral Donald Campbell; but he had recently been sent to sea with a ship of the line and three cruisers to operate, ostensibly at least, about the Straits against certain Algerine pirates who had become troublesome.[1]

The language which Junot and the Spanish ambassador held soon made itself felt. Sutton, the officer whom Orde had left in command of his cruisers, found he was refused victuals at Lagos. FitzGerald protested and was told quietly the prohibition would not be enforced. Quarantine, moreover, was declared against the British vessels, and Sutton found it impossible to carry out Orde's directions that he was to hire boats to look into Cadiz. He could thus get no intelligence whatever. Of his sloops the *Wasp* alone was in touch with him: the *Beagle* had entirely disappeared. On April 24th, however, FitzGerald was able to report home, on direct information from Cadiz, that the allied squadrons had been seen sailing westward on the 10th. He sent the news off immediately by the English packet; and for Lisbon he could feel easier. But not for long. On May 2nd he was startled by an express from Sutton to tell him that on April 27th an officer of the *Wasp* had succeeded in looking into Cadiz in a Portuguese boat and had found the whole Combined Squadron there. If this were true, it meant that Villeneuve had come back, and the danger was as great as ever. FitzGerald could not believe it. He had just ascertained from a neutral skipper exact details of the allied squadrons as they had sailed together to the westward, and the reports from Cadiz were that every one knew they were bound for Jamaica. Still certainty in the

[1] FitzGerald to Mulgrave, April 13th and 14th: *State Papers, Foreign (Portugal)*, vol. 47.

hope, as he said, that as the *Fisgard* had left for England two hours after the French had passed, she would have arrived in time to stop the expedition sailing.[1]

On the 4th, as the wind still held ahead, he resolved to anchor in Tetuan Bay and employ the time in filling up with water, beef, and fuel. While thus engaged he received the first suggestion of what was really happening. It was a reply from Captain Otway, the Navy Commissioner at Gibraltar, telling him of the entire disappearance of the Combined Squadron and of the general belief that it had gone to the West Indies. The news certainly shook his former conviction, but though it filled him with new anxiety it was not enough to change his purpose. Of the sure intelligence he had hoped to get from Orde's cruisers there was none, and no matter how pressing was the danger in the west, he would not act on mere rumours. "I cannot very properly run to the West Indies," he replied to Otway, "without something beyond mere surmise, and if I defer my departure Jamaica may be lost."

His attitude to the dilemma was well expressed by his first biographers in a noteworthy passage. One of them, McArthur, knew him well and had come near to being his secretary. The legend of a heaven-sent inspiration was already arising when they wrote, and in their view it should be nipped in the bud as fraught with danger. "It was entirely inconsistent," they declare, "with Lord Nelson's great professional character and regard for the discipline of the service to take so bold a step until he had every reason to believe they could not have sailed in any other direction. . . . It is the more necessary to make this remark lest other officers, led on by the impulse of zeal unsubdued by the reflection he employed and the splendour of resolute pursuit, may erroneously indulge in a contrary idea to their own destruction."[2]

[1] To Marsden, May 1st: Nicolas, vi. 418.
[2] Clarke and McArthur, *Life of Nelson*, II. Part, iii. 94.

His whole conduct at this juncture amply bears out his biographers' remarks. The West Indies became a probable destination, that was all. Till there could be no room for doubt he kept an open mind, still resolved to close on the strategic centre, if no sufficient information were forthcoming. But meanwhile he prepared everything for the possible eventuality. On May the 5th he formally constituted his second-in-command, Sir Richard Bickerton, Commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean during his possible absence, with orders to carry out in every particular "the Admiralty instructions for the protection and safety of their Sicilian and their Sardinian Majesties' dominions, as well as preventing the enemy from effecting any expedition against Egypt." The squadron he would have for the work must at first be weak enough. Bickerton's flag was flying in the *Royal Sovereign*, but she was a first-rate and too valuable to be spared. Nelson meant to take her with him and intended Bickerton to shift his flag to any other ship he chose in the squadron that was to be left under his command. It was to consist of nearly the whole of Nelson's cruisers and any additional force that might arrive from home. There were over a score all told, and Nelson himself kept only four, so careful was he to make good behind him the ground committed to his charge.

As these orders were being prepared the wind at last came fair, and he moved for the Straits to pass on and meet the *Amazon* from Lisbon whence alone he could hope to get the light which would clear the fog. Lisbon for the moment was the centre of information, and there, while Nelson moves west on the fitful Levanter, we must look before the position can be grasped in all its bearings.

CHAPTER VII

HOW NELSON MADE SURE

On the Tagus was being played one of the many underplots of Napoleon's vast contest with Pitt. All through the long imperial struggle between England and France, Lisbon, the womb of the Oceanic expansion of Europe, had been recognised as a point beyond price. Napoleon, like all his predecessors, was resolved not only that Portugal must not be a British ally, but that even neutrality must be denied her. Following the precedents of the old Family Compact, it was a term of his convention with Spain that Portugal must be forced at least to close her ports to British vessels; and towards the end of February he had sent off General Junot, his aide-de-camp and Colonel-General of his Hussars, as ambassador to Lisbon to see that it was done. Junot was long on the road, for he had first to visit Madrid to stir the Spanish Government to greater naval activity, and not till the second week in April did he finally set out for Lisbon.

It was an evil moment. Our minister there, Lord Robert FitzGerald, was bracing himself for the coming diplomatic struggle, when on April 13th he received Orde's letters to say he had been driven off his station by Villeneuve. On the morrow Junot arrived, and FitzGerald could not doubt that in a day or two he would see the Toulon squadron in the Tagus and that Portugal would be forced into the Napoleonic system while he stood by helpless. "The junction of the French and Spanish fleets at Cadiz," he wrote home, "will now enable the ambassadors of both

nations to hold what language they please here." There was no means of resistance. The Portuguese, it is true, were making an effort to restore their navy and had already secured the services of a British officer, Rear-Admiral Donald Campbell; but he had recently been sent to sea with a ship of the line and three cruisers to operate, ostensibly at least, about the Straits against certain Algerine pirates who had become troublesome.[1]

The language which Junot and the Spanish ambassador held soon made itself felt. Sutton, the officer whom Orde had left in command of his cruisers, found he was refused victuals at Lagos. FitzGerald protested and was told quietly the prohibition would not be enforced. Quarantine, moreover, was declared against the British vessels, and Sutton found it impossible to carry out Orde's directions that he was to hire boats to look into Cadiz. He could thus get no intelligence whatever. Of his sloops the *Wasp* alone was in touch with him: the *Beagle* had entirely disappeared. On April 24th, however, FitzGerald was able to report home, on direct information from Cadiz, that the allied squadrons had been seen sailing westward on the 10th. He sent the news off immediately by the English packet; and for Lisbon he could feel easier. But not for long. On May 2nd he was startled by an express from Sutton to tell him that on April 27th an officer of the *Wasp* had succeeded in looking into Cadiz in a Portuguese boat and had found the whole Combined Squadron there. If this were true, it meant that Villeneuve had come back, and the danger was as great as ever. FitzGerald could not believe it. He had just ascertained from a neutral skipper exact details of the allied squadrons as they had sailed together to the westward, and the reports from Cadiz were that every one knew they were bound for Jamaica. Still certainty in the

[1] FitzGerald to Mulgrave, April 13th and 14th: *State Papers, Foreign (Portugal)*, vol. 47.

matter was beyond his reach, and in his dilemma he fell back on a principle that is worth recording. The diplomatic and the naval intelligence were in conflict on a matter of moment, but the diplomatic situation turned on the situation at sea. It was primarily a naval matter, and therefore in consultation with Gambier, the Consul, a man on whose sagacity and knowledge every one relied, he concluded there was no choice but to act on the assumption that the naval intelligence was true. Accordingly they decided together to send it home at once and take such action as was in their power.[1]

Immediate action of some kind and on their own responsibility was absolutely necessary. They knew Knight and Craig were at hand. Only a few days before the *Orpheus*, a frigate that was cruising on the station, had gone out to try to meet them with a warning that Orde was gone. If she should fail to find them and Sutton's news was really true, they would be sailing straight into the lion's mouth. At all hazards they must be warned. Another English packet had just come in, and one of FitzGerald's staff was hurried away in her with orders to find them out. Twenty-four hours after he had gone the expedition appeared off the Tagus. Gambier sped out to them with the alarming news. He found the *Orpheus* had met them the day before, but they had missed the packet.

What was to be done? In view of what was going on in Lisbon it was an extremely delicate situation. But Gambier was at hand to advise and Knight and Craig did not hesitate. While the *Orpheus* was sent southward in search of trustworthy information as to the actual situation at Cadiz, to the Consul was committed a politely firm letter from the two commanders informing the Portuguese Government that they intended to take refuge in the Tagus and that if any attempt were made to obstruct their

[1] FitzGerald to Mulgrave, May 3rd: *Ibid.*, cf. *Barham Papers*, iii. 103.

entrance it would be taken as an act of hostility. The Portuguese were thus made as comfortable as possible with a plea of compulsion, and it had the desired effect. No opposition was offered, and next day the expedition quietly anchored inside the harbour defences.

The diplomatic air was immediately in a tempest. In the eyes of Junot and the Spanish ambassador, knowing as they did that Villeneuve was far across the Atlantic, the British movement could have but one meaning. It was obviously a device to forestall their game—a repetition of the successful British stroke of 1762. They had been expecting for some time that this was the real object of Craig's expedition and had warned Talleyrand of the danger.[1] Their fear was now turned into stern reality. Junot stormed, the Spaniard threatened. It was a pre-concerted trick, they protested, between the Portuguese and Pitt to secure the forts with British troops, and they vowed they must have at once either an ample and satisfactory explanation or their passports.

As we know, Pitt's military force was far too deeply engaged to permit him any such design, but the suspicions of the two enraged ambassadors were so far justified that Craig was actually making arrangements to seize the sea defences at the first sign of a French fleet in the offing. "It would have been excellent fun," wrote one of his officers in recording the curious incident.

Aranjo, the Portuguese minister, was at his wits' end. If he could not pacify Junot and his colleague it meant a Franco-Spanish invasion. If he broke with the British, retribution might come more swiftly still, for Nelson at any moment might appear. He could not afford to offend either party. He appealed to FitzGerald, hoping Craig did not mean to stop long, and FitzGerald could only assure him that the expedition would stay no longer than the

[1] See *ante*, p. 87.

day he got further intelligence of the enemy's movements which he was expecting hourly by the *Orpheus*.[1]

So the matter had to rest. Threaten as the two ambassadors would, they were helpless. Neither cared to take the extreme step of demanding their passports, and while they still hesitated the tension was relieved. On the third day the *Orpheus* came back with confirmation of FitzGerald's belief that Villeneuve had not returned, and with what was still better, the long-expected tidings that Nelson had passed the Straits. Thereupon Knight made the signal to weigh, and prepared to go out to meet him.[2]

Some fifty miles beyond Cape St. Vincent, the *Orpheus* had fallen in with Parker in the *Amazon*, whom it will be remembered Nelson had sent forward to the Tagus to seek the information on which his final decision was to rest. Together they proceeded off St. Vincent—the rendezvous Nelson had given—and there Parker handed over his mails and despatches to the *Orpheus* to be taken on to Lisbon, while he waited to meet Nelson with the news which the *Orpheus* had given him. By this means a couple of days might be saved. It was the Nelsonian way, and Nelson himself had been doing the like. The fair breeze had come before he had completed his stores at Tetuan, but he would not waste the wind. Off Gibraltar it failed, and he anchored again to try to complete. But in five hours it came fair, and he was away once more for St. Vincent, burning for the information which must decide his course.

He was still, as he said, as much in the dark as ever; but since he left Tetuan the probabilities had changed. In his letters to the Admiralty he no longer says that if he hears nothing he shall close on the Channel, but that probably he will go to the West Indies. The cause of this

[1] FitzGerald to Mulgrave, May 5th: *S. P. Foreign (Portugal)*, 47. Log of the *Orpheus*: *Captains' Logs*, P. R. O.

[2] Fitzgerald to Mulgrave, May 8th.

change is scarcely doubtful. At Gibraltar he had got into contact with Admiral Campbell and the Portuguese squadron, and Captain Hargood of the *Belleisle* tells us he received from him "important information as to the destination of the French squadron." Not a word of this appears in Nelson's correspondence, and naturally enough, since Campbell's part in it was unneutral service, which if known would get him into serious trouble. What it was we can surmise with tolerable certainty. In any case it was regarded as so important by Junot and his colleague that, on Campbell's return to Lisbon, they insisted on his dismissal and he had to go home to die in poverty and neglect.[1]

Yet it was not Campbell's information that brought Nelson to a final decision. There must be greater certainty still before he could take the crucial step, and this he hoped to get off St. Vincent either from the *Amazon* or one of Orde's cruisers, which he now knew had been left to watch. It was on the evening of May 6th, the same day he saw Campbell, that Nelson had left Gibraltar. Meeting with light airs, it was not till the morning of the 9th he had made St. Vincent. His destination was still uncertain, and his stores for a voyage across the Atlantic still incomplete. "We have heard nothing of the French fleet since they left Cadiz on the 10th," wrote Hardy, his flag captain, as they sighted the cape. "It is therefore strongly believed by Lord Nelson that they are gone for the West Indies, and of course we shall follow them if we hear nothing of their destination from Lisbon, from whence we expect the *Amazon* will join to-morrow." Up to this time, therefore, the question was still open, but after his manner Nelson made the best use of the delay till certainty could be attained. The storeships which Orde had sent into Lagos were still there, and with evident enjoyment he decided to

[1] Allen, *Life of Captain Sir William Hargood*, p. 110. Clarke and McArthur, ii. 489, and see *post*, p. 122.

move thither and help himself to all he wanted. "Here we are, my dear Campbell," he wrote to his friend next day from Lagos, "clearing Sir John Orde's transports . . . completing ourselves to five months, and to-morrow I start for the West Indies. . . . Admiral Knight . . . is at present off Lisbon with the convoy of troops. I wish he would come here; but he has been deceived by false information that the Combined Squadrons were still in Cadiz—I wish they were."[1] In the evening he moved back to St. Vincent, and at ten o'clock the same night Hardy added a postscript to his letter. "We are now off St. Vincent, and his lordship has made up his mind to bear up for the West Indies in the course of to-morrow."[2] Thus to a few hours we can tell when it was Nelson took his momentous decision, and we can tell, moreover, exactly on what information it was taken.

The first light on the actual situation that he obtained was from his old friend Sutton in the *Amphion*, who was still at the post where Orde had left him. It was also the fullest, though Nelson in his Journal would not admit it. All he says is that at half-past seven in the evening of the 9th she joined company, "and I ordered Captain Sutton under my command, who informed me he had gained no intelligence of the enemy since their leaving Cadiz." But this was not the whole story, for Sutton was able to give him negative evidence which could leave no doubt that the enemy had left European waters. Two days earlier he had spoken the *Lively*, a frigate that was little more than a week out from the Channel, and this is what she had to tell. She had left Spithead as late as April 27th and only seven days before her captain had been on board Gardner's flagship, where he heard that Orde was falling

[1] To Rear-Admiral George Campbell, May 10th: Nicolas, vi. 431. Nelson in addressing the letter seems to confuse Donald Campbell with Captain George Campbell, who had been commanding the *Canopus* under him.

[2] Hardy to Mansfield, May 10th: *Nelson's Hardy*, p. 127.

back on Ushant, and that nothing had been heard of Villeneuve. On the morrow, as he sped south, he had seen the junction between Gardner and Orde actually made, and a little later he passed a convoy northward-bound which had not been molested. Nelson therefore could be certain that for more than three weeks after the Combined Squadron had left Cadiz it had not been heard of anywhere to the northward.

Now according to Captain Parker of the *Amazon*, it was this intelligence, at least as much as his own, which caused Nelson to make up his mind. Writing to his father to explain why the fleet went to the West Indies, he says, "Lord Nelson was satisfied from the very recent accounts from Lisbon, as well as from England, brought in seven days only by the *Lively*, that the enemy were not gone to the north, and instantly made up his mind to go to the West Indies."[1] Parker then believed that it was the negative intelligence that had most to do with removing Nelson's hesitation—that is, he could be certain he was not wanted off Ushant.

The *Amazon* herself rejoined about an hour later, bringing all the Lisbon news. Amongst the papers handed over to her by the *Orpheus* was the deposition of an American skipper whom the *Orpheus* had spoken. He had left Cadiz on May 2nd and was able to report the exact composition of the Combined Squadron, the number of troops it carried, and the names of the commanders. "The reports of their destination," he said, "were various. By some it was supposed they were destined for Ireland: and by others, with great probability, for the West Indies, particularly Jamaica." So perfect a confirmation of the intelligence which Nelson had from Campbell, from home, and from Lisbon, must have cleared away the last shade of doubt, and then and there he sat down to inform the Admiralty he meant to go.[2]

[1] Phillimore, *Sir William Parker*, p. 292.
[2] Nicolas, vi. 430, and *note*.

The only trouble was that the enemy had now a whole month's start of him. Yet he did not despair of being in time to save Jamaica and the other British islands. So great was his confidence in the superior seamanship of his fleet, he was sure with luck and judgment he could gain many days upon the chase. But every hour was precious and yet he could not give the word to go. He now knew Craig's expedition had put into Lisbon on the false information that had been received as to Villeneuve's having returned to Cadiz, and his last orders from home were to see it safe on its way. From the American skipper's report, moreover, he had learnt what the actual state of affairs at Cadiz was. A number of ships of the line were fitting there for sea in hot haste, and in spite of his eagerness to be gone he determined he must await the arrival of the expedition and see it safely into the Gut.

Next morning, to his great relief, Knight met him off Cape St. Vincent with the Admiralty orders relating to the expedition. These he at once sent forward to Bickerton that he might do what was necessary to co-operate with Craig, while he himself made such arrangements for the safe passage of the convoy as would justify his leaving the station without an hour's delay. To this end he directed Knight to take the transports down wide of Cadiz and Tarifa and then run straight along the Moorish coast into Gibraltar.[1] Beyond that point there was still the Cartagena squadron to consider. At all costs it must be rendered powerless; and after a short deliberation, Nelson resolved, in spite of his relative inferiority to the Combined Squadron, to hand over the *Royal Sovereign* to Knight.

No decision of Nelson's is more eloquent of his grasp of the true end and meaning of naval warfare. He was about to pursue and try to bring to action a numerically

[1] Nelson to Earl Camden, May 14th: Nicolas, vi. 438. His instructions to Knight are *ibid.*, p. 433.

superior force, and Captain Parker used to say that one of the conditions on which he relied for success was that Villeneuve had no three-deckers, and that "he reckoned on the great superiority in close action of three batteries of guns over two."[1] Yet so firm was his grasp of the war-plan and the place his fleet had to fill in it, that at the last moment he gave up a 100-gun ship to secure directly the true and paramount end of his operations. In naval warfare there is nothing more difficult than a correct adjustment of action between the ever-competing claims of the ulterior and the primary object—between striking directly to secure the object of the campaign, and using the indirect but more drastic method of a concentrated stroke at the enemy's fleet. Here we have a decision on the point from Nelson in the zenith of his powers, and it is surely difficult to overestimate its value.

At home the decision was well received. "He seems to have acted most handsomely," wrote Lord Hardwicke on opening Nelson's despatch to Ireland, "as indeed he always does for the public service, in weakening his own force for the security of the convoy under the *Queen* and the *Dragon*."[2]

The same evening, some twenty miles to the southward of St. Vincent, the two squadrons parted company, Knight to see his convoy safely into Gibraltar, while Nelson bore up on his long chase, taking with him his remaining ten of the line and the frigates *Decade*, *Amphion*, and *Amazon*. The

[1] Phillimore, *Life of Sir William Parker*, i. 289.

[2] Hardwicke to Charles Yorke, June 1st: *Hardwicke Papers*, *Add. MSS.* 35706. Nelson was partly reconciled to the loss of the *Royal Sovereign* because she wanted docking badly and was therefore slow. But the *Superb* was in the same condition and he took her on. He informed the Admiralty that his reason for detaching the *Royal Sovereign* was to render it impossible for all the force at Cartagena to make any impression upon Knight's force. Here then we have further evidence of the value Nelson placed on three-decked ships. The Cartagena squadron consisted of six two-deckers, and he considered he had enabled Knight to deal with it by leaving him with two three-deckers and one seventy-four.

last the Admiralty heard of him was by a letter written on May 14th, as he approached Madeira, to assure them that even if Villeneuve had not gone to the West Indies, little harm could come of his chase. "If they are not there," he said, "the squadron will be back again by the end of June —in short, before the enemy can know where I am." This element in the reasoning which brought him to his decision must not be forgotten—the moral effect of an unlocated fleet. How rightly he calculated the factor we shall see presently in Napoleon's inability to make up his mind where Nelson had gone or in what quarter the "fougueux amiral" would reappear, no less than in the paralysis which the uncertainty produced on Villeneuve's will.

CHAPTER VIII

COLLINGWOOD'S FLYING SQUADRON

Of all parts of the art of war there is none perhaps of higher value than the interpretation of intelligence. At the end of our long series of maritime wars with France, the faculty of interpretation had reached in the sea service its fullest powers. So wide was the theatre, so slow the means of communication and so precious every rare item of news, that sharp necessity had developed an acuteness of sense that gives at times an impression of second sight. The whole service was as it were irradiated with an alert sympathy, a mutual understanding between the War Staff and the fighting lines, by which admirals afloat seemed always to see into the mind of the Admiralty and the Admiralty to rest assured of what the admirals would do. It was a factor in the struggle which Napoleon failed to take into account, or even to appreciate. In his overweening self-confidence he would not believe that the British sea service possessed a strategic intuition as great as his own on land. Yet it was even greater or at least more formidable than his—for in the one case it depended on a single master-mind, in the other it was an instructed instinct that was alive and active in every centre of direction. At every turn of the campaign we feel its quickening impulse, and nowhere more strongly than in the process by which the Admiralty came to the same conclusion as Nelson, and in the action they took in consequence.

It will be remembered that on first receiving Lord

Mark Kerr's intelligence that Villeneuve had passed the Straits, they regarded Jamaica as his probable objective, and ordered Collingwood with part of the Flying Squadron to Madeira. His instructions were to reinforce the West Indian station, should he ascertain that that was the enemy's destination and that Nelson had not himself anticipated the movement. Then came Orde's news, with the suggestion that Nelson had been diverted to Egypt and that Villeneuve's operations indicated an attack on Craig's expedition, to be followed by a concentration at some western rendezvous for seizing the command of the Channel. We saw also how steps were promptly taken with the object of saving Craig and securing a counter concentration on Gardner off Ushant.

But even as the necessary orders were being signed, tidings reached Plymouth which gave a new and clearer light upon the situation. Again it came from one of Orde's cruisers, and this perhaps will explain why the Admiralty took a view of his conduct so different from the reprehension which modern critics have made his undiluted portion. His reception at home was perfectly normal. He had requested to be relieved, and on his arrival he was directed to bring his squadron to Plymouth for a refit and to strike his flag, but his conduct as a whole was approved.

The cruiser in question was the long-lost *Beagle*, the sloop which Orde had left with Sutton to watch the Straits and which it will be remembered had disappeared into space. The mystery was now explained. On April 9th, being then under Cape Spartel, sheltering from the Levanter with the Portuguese squadron in company, she had sighted some strange vessels passing the Straits on the heels of the homeward-bound Mediterranean convoy. So suspicious was the situation that after comparing notes with one of the Portuguese cruisers, Captain Burn, her commander, had decided to beat into Tangier for intelli-

gence. There next day he heard from the Consul that it was the Toulon squadron to the number of thirteen of the line and five frigates which he had seen passing the Straits, and that both Orde and the convoy were in serious danger. Thereupon he immediately made sail again to look for the Admiral off Cadiz. Next morning outside the Straits he saw the strangers again, steering to the westward, and the Portuguese squadron still on the watch off Cape Spartel. They too must have seen the movement westward or at least part of it, and hence the importance of Campbell's information to Nelson. On reaching the Cadiz rendezvous Burn found Orde already gone, and no trace of the Toulon squadron inside. But to seaward he could see the four belated Spanish vessels beating out also to the westward. It was obvious they had just left Cadiz, and till the evening of the 12th he kept them in sight. Having thus fixed their course he hurried away to try to find the Admiral at St. Vincent. On his way he spoke an American bound for Toulon, who said he had seen a squadron of five of the line to the westward. Accordingly Burn stood out in that direction, but Orde, as we know, had turned south, and though the *Beagle* beat north and west till the 18th she failed to get touch with him. Once, it is true, she came within thirty miles of the squadron, but still finding no trace of it, Burn decided, as soon as he had made sufficient westing for a fair wind, to hold away for Ferrol.[1]

In this Burn showed admirable judgment. For Orde was then to the westward of him making for the same point. The *Beagle*, however, being more weatherly than the squadron, had got a day ahead, and all she found off Ortegal was one of Calder's cruisers, the *Indefatigable*, of which Moore, the captor of the galleons, was still in command. He took her to the Admiral, who as usual, in the wild

[1] For the *Beagle's* movements see Burn's Report: *Captains' Letters* 1535, April 12 and 25; and *Captains' Logs*, 1530; and Chart, *ante*, p. 63.

westerly weather that had brought the *Beagle* up, had taken the squadron under Cape Prior for shelter. Of Orde there was no news, though he was then actually passing north, only a hundred miles to the westward. Accordingly, after communicating all she had seen, the *Beagle* made her way direct for home, probably by Calder's orders. Her information was indeed priceless, for it was actually later and more certain than anything Nelson had obtained before he decided to chase; and with it she anchored in Plymouth Sound on April 30th.

Her invaluable report was in Barham's hands on May 2nd. It was not entirely satisfactory. Captain Burn had said nothing explicitly of Villeneuve's squadron, but as he had looked into Cadiz it was to be assumed from his silence it was not there. Nor had he seen the four Spaniards actually leave Cadiz. Still the inference was pretty clear. Unfortunately, however, he had omitted in his report an item that was indispensable for a trustworthy interpretation of his news. In those days there was no thought of training officers in a scientific method of reporting intelligence, and Captain Burn had omitted to say how the wind was when he parted company. Till this was known there must be doubt as to whether the course observed was a true one or not, and before making any fresh distribution Barham sent down for the *Beagle's* log.[1] Still something could be done. The threat to Jamaica was clearly intensified. A packet was on the point of sailing for the West Indies, and that night went off warning to the Admirals, with instructions that General Myers, Commander-in-chief in the Leeward Islands, had been given authority to detach two or three thousand of his troops to Jamaica in case of need,

[1] *Admiralty Minutes*, 153, May 2nd. Admiralty to Admiral Young, Commander-in-chief at Plymouth, May 2nd: "Captain Burn has omitted to say how the wind was when he met the squadron, supposed to have sailed from Toulon on 9th or 10th ultimo." Villeneuve does not record having been observed.

and that Cochrane was to do all he could to expedite their transport.[1]

Two days later Barham had made up his mind. He had indeed a practical certainty—which Nelson did not arrive at till five days later—that Villeneuve's destination was the West Indies, and he determined to act at once. His first step was to tell Gardner to send away Collingwood and his five of the line. Collingwood's orders were, as before, to go to Madeira, ascertain whether Villeneuve or Nelson had passed, and act accordingly, leaving word what he had done for the Consul to send back to Gibraltar and Cadiz. If there was no certain intelligence he was to go straight on to Barbadoes and co-operate with General Myers for the security of Jamaica.[2] As, however, the whole matter was still uncertain, Gardner was given discretion to detain the detachment if he thought it desirable, in view of any fresh information that might have reached him. Collingwood's orders were to be handed to him in a sealed packet at the moment of sailing and not to be opened till he was clear of the Channel.

Before the despatches went out there arrived Orde's message that he was falling back on Gardner.[3] Thereupon Knight's orders had to be cancelled. He had been told, it will be remembered, he was to reinforce Calder at Ferrol. He was now again ordered to send his two ships direct to the West Indies as a reinforcement for Collingwood, if Nelson had not gone there.[4]

In all these arrangements Barham's grip on the central point was never relaxed. In spite of all the distant calls he clung to it with a tenacity that was beyond Napoleon's

[1] *Out-letters* (*Secret Orders*), 1363, May 2nd.

[2] To Gardner and Collingwood: *Ibid.*, May 4th. These are the first orders signed by Barham. For Gardner's orders, see also *Barham Papers*, iii. 244.

[3] Admiralty to Collingwood, Postscript: *Out-Letters* (*Secret Orders*), 1363, May 4th.

[4] *Ibid.*

calculations and made hopeless all his sanguine attempts to dissipate our home concentration. After the receipt of Orde's appreciation pointing to a hostile concentration in the west, Gardner was strictly enjoined that all orders for detachments such as Collingwood's were to be read as conditional on his having enough force to keep eighteen of the line with his flag. Subject to this minimum he was also, if possible, to keep Calder's squadron up to eight.[1] At the same time corresponding directions were framed for Nelson in order to provide for filling the gap in the home fleet which Collingwood's detachment would make. He was authorised, if he had not followed Villeneuve, to leave in the Mediterannean as many ships of the line and cruisers as were needed to watch such force as the enemy had in Toulon and Cartagena. With the rest he was to proceed off Cadiz, and leaving there five cruisers to report movements to Calder and home, he was to close on Gardner; or if he preferred he might remain in the Mediterranean himself and send his superfluous ships home under Bickerton.[2]

The instructions for detaching Collingwood reached Gardner on May 9th. He immediately proceeded to complete the necessary ships with stores, and just as Nelson was making up his mind to go to the West Indies, he sat down to inform the Admiralty that as he had no further intelligence he intended to detach Collingwood at once. On the morrow, however, it began to blow hard from the west with a big sea, and the work of completing the ships for foreign service was stopped. Gardner, therefore, ran to the Lizard for smooth water, where orders met him to add two or three more ships to the detachment. Then as the heavy weather continued he ordered Collingwood into Causand Bay with eight of the line, and after

[1] To Gardner: *Out-Letters (Secret Orders)*, 1363, May 9th.
[2] *Ibid.*, May 9th.

handing him the sealed orders he himself returned to his station off Ushant.[1]

So far Barham had been left a free hand to keep his hold on the naval situation. But at this point the War Office intervened, and seriously complicated his task. In view of the danger which seemed to threaten the West Indies it had been decided to divert thither the force which was gathering at Cork under Sir Eyre Coote to reinforce India. He had accordingly been appointed Governor and Commander-in-chief of Jamaica, and was under orders to sail as soon as possible. This resolution had been taken early in April, apparently on news of the complete pacification that had followed Sir Arthur Wellesley's successes and on the reports of the Foreign Office spies as to Napoleon's real objective. Orders had already gone to Commodore Hood to throw out his cruisers to receive the expedition, but it was also necessary to cover its passage out of the danger zone.[2] In the view of the War Office Villeneuve's escape rendered the provision which Barham was making inadequate for the purpose. They therefore demanded that Collingwood's squadron should be raised to twelve of the line, and be specially charged with the covering duty. Barham naturally objected. Such military movements oversea, when the command was seriously threatened, he had always regarded as contrary to the first principles of maritime strategy. Indeed it was a conflict of opinion on that very point which had been at the bottom of his quarrel with the Government in 1795, and had ended in his forced resignation. In this case the objections were glaring. The demand of the War Office would mean that he must reduce the Western Squadron below his minimum, it would prevent his reinforcing Calder in what at the moment he held to be

[1] Gardner to Marsden, May 9th, 11th, and 15th: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 255, 258, 260–1.

[2] *Secret Orders*, 1363. To Hood, April 5th. To Captain Woodriff of the *Calcutta*, April 29th. To Collingwood and to Nelson, May 17th.

the most critical position, and generally it would subordinate his arrangements for securing command to a secondary operation. Pitt, however, must have insisted. Of the actual conflict there is no record. All we know is that it was not till an express command had been procured from the King that Barham consented to send the required order down to Plymouth. It directed Collingwood to add to his squadron three of the line that were on the point of sailing with sealed orders (probably to Gardner or Calder), and as before to go to Madeira to cover the expedition, and if he found Nelson was in pursuit of Villeneuve to return to Plymouth.[1]

Hardly, however, were the orders on the road, when a despatch reached the Foreign Office from FitzGerald at Lisbon containing the unlucky false news that Villeneuve had put back to Cadiz and announcing that Craig's expedition had taken refuge in the Tagus. Coote was ordered to stand fast, and without a moment's delay word went off to both Ushant and Plymouth to stop Collingwood until further orders. Next day, in fear he might be already gone, an urgent demand went forward for a frigate to go down to Cadiz instantly, find out the truth, meet Collingwood with her report at the Finisterre rendezvous, and then bring home his despatches which would explain what he had decided to do.[2]

That they should know this as soon as possible was vital, in view of the fresh instructions which had to be thought out for him. The situation was one of extreme difficulty. Little credit was given to the report of Villeneuve's return, but the possibility had to be faced. If it were true, it would mean that his first movement to the westward was a feint to draw attention to Jamaica, and

[1] *Secret Orders*, 1363, May 14th: Camden to Admiralty, May 10th: *In-letters* (*Secretary of State*), 4199: same to Barham, *Barham Papers*, iii. 309.
[2] *Secret Orders*, 1363, May 15th and 16th.

Pitt, it must be remembered, had just been warned by
of his most active agents abroad that Napoleon was in
on making false movements in order to conceal his ac
line of operations. The supposed return to Cadiz indic
that the real objective was either in the Mediterranean
as Orde had argued so forcibly, the Channel. Of the
the Channel was the less likely, for Napoleon was in I
Moreover it so happened that the political situation ca
acutely at the moment for the security of the Mediterran
The convention with Russia was trembling in the bala
A despatch from Leveson-Gower had arrived on May 9t
the day the last orders were issued to Gardner—to
the treaty had been signed with the objectionable art
relating to the evacuation of Malta. It was actually, th
fore, in the midst of the naval crisis that Woronzow had
stormy interview with Pitt in which he had to inform
hard-pressed minister that the Czar demanded the abso
and unconditional assent to the Malta article as a *sine
non* of his ratification of the treaty.[1] Pitt, so the ambass
tells us, received his communication like a thunder-c
To increase the difficulty of his position he had heard f
St. Petersburg that the Czar was again complaining bitt
of the British delays in fulfilling the promises of milit
action in the Mediterranean; and here was Craig hard
fast in Lisbon, unable to move.[2]

The point on which the Czar insisted was the one ab
all others on which it was impossible for Pitt to yi
Already, on first hearing from Gower of the propc
new condition, Mulgrave had been instructed to addre
strong note of protest to Woronzow. It was absolu
essential, he wrote, to Great Britain, and particularly in v
of French designs on Egypt and India, to have "a sec

[1] Mulgrave to Gower, June 7th: Holland Rose, *Third Coalition*, p.
F. O. Russia, 58.
[2] De Martens, *Recueil de Traités*, xi. 109, and *ante*, p. 24.

port in the Mediterranean not liable to capture on a sudden attack at the commencement of war." If his Britannic Majesty were disposed to sacrifice Malta he knew he could get a separate peace that would absolutely secure his own position, but what he wished to obtain was the permanent independence of the Powers of Europe. It was in this note that he had claimed that England was the legitimate successor to the Naval Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Charles the Fifth had established them at Malta as guardians against the then existing enemy of Christendom, and it was only as a British naval port that the old stronghold could serve that purpose now.[1]

Accordingly Pitt, in reply to Woronzow, told him with equal firmness that the Czar's demand meant the breakdown of the alliance. Neither the King nor he could grant it if they would. Any government that consented to give up Malta would be flung from power in a universal howl of indignation. Woronzow privately shared Pitt's view, but he continued loyally to urge the Russian case, till Pitt was forced to cut him short with the ultimatum already recorded. His last words should be recalled. "So," he said, "however great our grief, we are compelled to abandon hope of seeing an agreement consummated, since its express condition is our renunciation of Malta. We will continue the war alone. It will be a maritime war."[2]

Thus at the unlucky moment when the false intelligence from Lisbon came to hand the whole situation turned on the command of the Mediterranean, and to leave the enemy concentrated at its entrance and free to act was impossible. It was there Collingwood must go, and go in strength. To send him in inferior force was to court disaster. The probability, on Strachan's report, was that Nelson had

[1] Mulgrave to Woronzow, May 7th; Rose, *Third Coalition*, p. 145. For the whole argument see same to same, June 7th, in which despatch it was repeated and developed: *Post*, *Appendix A*, p. 473.

[2] De Martens, *op. cit.*, xi. 111, and cf. *ante*, p. 24.

gone to Egypt and his co-operation could not be counted on. Collingwood might have to fight alone, and if he fought the political situation demanded that it must be with the assurance of a real victory. Sweden and Prussia were both hanging back, and even the shock of Napoleon's coronation as King of Italy had failed to stiffen the irresolution of Austria. Nothing but a victory, decisive and indisputable, could serve Pitt's turn. Anything less would certainly destroy the faint hope that still existed of forming his great coalition.

But was it possible to spare Collingwood the necessary strength without endangering the Ushant position? It was already overstrained. To give Collingwood what was wanted would bring Gardner's force seriously below Barham's minimum. It was a dilemma that called for the highest courage and resolution, and the nicest balancing of risks. Not even the decision which Nelson had just taken demanded a greater measure of warlike virtue, but like him Pitt and Barham did not flinch. In two days they had made up their minds to run the risk and strike for the command of the Mediterranean. On May 17th, accordingly, Collingwood's final orders went forward. At Plymouth he had already eleven of the line with his flag, but that was not enough. He was therefore to rejoin Gardner and obtain from him a flag-officer with another three-decker and two more seventy-fours. With this powerful squadron he was to proceed to Lisbon, where he would find Knight and add his two ships to his command. He would then have a force of three three-deckers and thirteen others, and be in a position to proceed off Cadiz and clear up the situation. If the Combined Squadron was there he was to blockade it. If he found it had gone to the West Indies and Nelson after it, he was to reinforce him in proportion to the enemy's strength. The rest of his force he was to send back to Plymouth. If Nelson had not gone he was

to go himself with twelve sail, so as to bring the force on the West Indian station up to eighteen; and if he ascertained the enemy had a larger force than this, he was to take as many more as were necessary. If, on the other hand, he found the enemy had gone into the Mediterranean he was to follow them, and in case of meeting Nelson he was to show him the new instructions and follow his orders.

Corresponding orders were issued to Nelson, on the assumption that the report of Villeneuve's return to Cadiz was true. In that case, if he met Collingwood he was to blockade the Combined Squadron with twenty of the line, but to be at liberty to form such detachments as he thought necessary to watch Cartagena and Toulon.

Though the effect of the new disposition was to reduce Gardner's force to fifteen of the line against Ganteaume's twenty-one, the risk was probably not so great as it appears or beyond what a sound defensive basis demanded. Of his fifteen ships three were only sixty-fours, which at that time hardly counted as ships of the line; but, on the other hand, no less than nine were three-deckers,[1] and in Plymouth and Portsmouth were Orde's squadron and several reserve ships. All of them were actively refitting, and with a few exceptions they were capable of taking the sea at twenty-four hours' notice. Moreover Barham had in mind a device which would certainly secure him a respite of a week at least. It was simple enough. Gardner was instructed, as soon as Collingwood joined him, to look into Brest with the whole force before he detached the squadron destined for Cadiz. Such a display of strength could be relied on to keep Ganteaume quiet till he was able to ascertain what Gardner's real force was, and by that time fresh ships would be ready.

Such then was the solution of the difficult strategical

[1] Gardner to Marsden, May 7th; *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 278.

problem with which Pitt and Barham so suddenly had to deal. Interesting as it is, it has long been forgotten, for it was destined never to be carried out. The great mass of our old strategical lore, which served us so well and cost so much to obtain, has passed into oblivion for similar reasons. Only by patient excavation can it be recovered, and only by the recovery of the unexecuted schemes can we hope to be safe from the danger of crude generalisation based on the comparatively few cases that survived above the surface.

Two events at the last moment occurred to stop this particular movement and to commit it to oblivion. As Collingwood sailed from Plymouth to join Gardner, Gardner received the despatches which Nelson had sent him from Toro to announce his intention of coming off Scilly, if he heard nothing of the Combined Squadron from Lisbon.[1] Gardner immediately sent a cruiser to the rendezvous and forwarded Nelson's despatches to the Admiralty with a request for instructions. The Admiralty, however, decided that no directions could be given until further intelligence of Nelson's squadron should be received.

Close on the heels of this surprise came another, and this time it was one that called for prompter action. On May 22nd, as Gardner and Collingwood were before Brest making the joint demonstration which Barham had directed as a preliminary to Collingwood's parting company, word came in from Calder that one of his cruiser captains, Maitland of the *Loire*, had located an enemy's squadron, ten days before, some five hundred miles to the westward of Ferrol. Shadowing it till nightfall he was chased off, but not before he ascertained it was the Rochefort squadron (details of which he had obtained from an American) and that it was making for Cape Ortegal.[2] With this informa-

[1] Gardner to Marsden, May 19th, with enclosures: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 266.

[2] See Gardner to Marsden, May 22nd; *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 275; and Maitland's report; *In-letters*, 128. Maitland saw them on the 11th in "lat.

tion he made off to Calder, and on the 14th found him in his usual position off Cape Prior. Calder promptly assumed that Missiessy intended to make a landfall at Cape Ortegal on his way back to Rochefort, and at daybreak next morning he was off that point. Not finding the enemy there, as he hoped, he concluded he must have kept more to the north, and he determined to make a push north-north-east to cut him off if, as he expected, he was running down the latitude of Rochefort. This was a move on which he could venture without prejudice to his blockade, for the wind was blowing hard from the south-west, foul for the Ferrol squadron to get out. In the evening, however, it unfortunately came into the north, with every sign of shifting still further. With a chance of an easterly wind he dared not leave Ferrol open, and he felt compelled to desist. There was nothing for it but to send the *Loire* on to Gardner and to take his squadron back to its station.[1]

Here then was news which materially altered the situation from what it was when Gardner and Collingwood received their last orders. In the first place Missiessy's inexplicable reappearance, coming as it did when the report of Villeneuve's return to Cadiz was still uncontradicted, shook to their foundations the deductions on which Barham was proceeding. It was Missiessy's supposed presence in the West Indies that gave colour to the indications of a campaign or a concentration in that quarter. What then could his sudden return mean? And why was he coming

43° 44′ and long. 20° 48′ W. (by chronometer 20° 16′)." With a westerly wind they were steering E. by S.½S. This must be magnetic, the variation being about 22½ degrees W. True E. by S.½S. would have brought them below Finisterre, an impossible course for Missiessy to be steering on a fair wind. The practice of French fleets returning from the West Indies to the Bay seems to have been to make the latitude of Ortegal about 500 miles W. and then run down it for a landfall. The knowledge of this practice accounts for Calder's advanced cruiser being where she was. To his other precise information Maitland added coloured representations of the signals Missiessy had made.

[1] Gardner to Marsden, May 22nd, enclosing Calder to Gardner, May 15th; *Blockade of Brest*, ii. pp. 275–7.

back just as Villeneuve was going out? Or was it sible that Villeneuve was never intended to go? In second place—and this is what concerned Gardner Collingwood most nearly—it meant a serious increas force in their immediate neighbourhood. What ought to do in view of the discretion allowed them? The Admirals conferred together and agreed there was no d that the three-decker and four of the line, which Mait had seen, were safe back in Rochefort or possibly L'Or For Gardner to give Collingwood the reinforcement had been ordered would now reduce the Ushant squa to a dangerous weakness, and taking advantage of latitude which had been originally given him in cas fresh information, he decided to retain with his flag the ships of Graves's division which formed the last additic the Flying Squadron and to send Collingwood down the remaining nine.

The reason he gave to the Admiralty was this: "As of the enemy's ships are returned from the West Indies the Vice-Admiral (Collingwood) is directed to detach proportion of ships to the West Indies as . . . the en may have sent there, fourteen ships would be more tha would now require to take down." As for the bloc of Cadiz, he felt that it would not be prejudiced by action. "I hope," he concluded, "the steps I have t will meet with their lordships' approbation, as, should i ascertained that the Toulon fleet is returned to Cadiz five ships I have detained can very soon be sent after Vice-Admiral, and probably reach the point of his pre intended destination nearly as soon as himself."[1]

[1] Gardner to Marsden, May 22nd: *Ibid.*, p. 275. The ships he det were *Foudroyant* 80 (Graves's flag), *Windsor Castle* 98, *Warrior* 74, *Repu Raisonnable* 64. For the orders issued to Gardner on May 25th, o assumption that his force was now reduced to a strength inferior to t the Brest Squadron, see *Barham Papers*, iii. 246. He was specially rem that hope of success against a superior force could only rest on "su skill and activity," and these advantages could only be obtained by co practice in tactical exercises.

Admiralty did approve his conduct, but while waiting for directions he did not think himself entitled to use the detained ships either to blockade Rochefort or reinforce Calder who badly needed relief. All he did was to detach Collingwood on the 23rd with his nine of the line, and wait for further orders.

CHAPTER IX

MODIFICATIONS OF NAPOLEON'S PLANS

As things actually stood, Gardner's action exactly fitted the situation. May 20th was the day on which Napoleon had to recognise that his scheme for a concentration in the West Indies had broken down. After urging Ganteaume by every means in his power to get to sea without fighting, he had informed him, if he could not escape by midnight on the 20th, he was to stay where he was for a different combination. It was on the 20th, too, that Missiessy put into Rochefort, sick and dispirited, and with his squadron entirely unfit for action.

So far as the campaign was concerned his mission had been a failure. When he had sailed at the beginning of the new year, it had been for the purpose of colonial attack to which Napoleon, having laid aside his invasion, intended to devote his navy. Missiessy's special function was to throw supplies into the French islands, capture Dominica and St. Lucia in concert with the local forces, and then to raid and levy contributions on the smaller British islands. In pursuance of these instructions he reached Martinique on February 20th, and next day, after consultation with the local officers, proceeded against Roseau, the capital of Dominica.

The surprise was complete. Appearing off the place under British colours he was welcomed as a friend. General Prevost, the governor, actually sent off one of his staff to do the honours, and the officer did not discover the trick

till he was on board Missiessy's flag-ship. General Lagrange, who was in command of the French troops, was consequently able to land with scarcely any resistance, and to seize positions so good that Prevost found Roseau untenable. He therefore decided to allow the local force to capitulate; but before Lagrange realised the craft of his move he had withdrawn the whole of the regular garrison, and was in full retreat to a fortress in the extremity of the island known as Fort Cabril. The moment Lagrange detected the movement he saw its danger, and begged Missiessy to detach a division to cut off the British retreat. A flat calm prevailed, and Missiessy protested not a ship could stir. Lagrange begged for the squadron's boats. Again the Admiral refused. To risk paralysing his squadron by exposing its crews in a military operation was a responsibility he did not feel called upon to take, and the result was that Prevost secured himself in a position that turned the tables upon the French. Fort Cabril could only be reduced by a siege, and for a siege the expedition was wholly unprepared. Accordingly while news sped to Europe of the capture of the island, Missiessy found himself compelled to withdraw and to rest content with a contribution of 100,000 francs from Roseau, and about a score of small prizes captured at their moorings.

For the present at any rate no attempt was made upon St. Lucia. Missiessy preferred to continue his way northward for less hazardous operations, and after landing at Guadaloupe the troops which he had brought to reinforce the garrison, he proceeded to raid the small British islands that lay beyond. From Nevis, St. Christopher's, and Montserrat he exacted ransoms, but there his activity ended. In his view it was now time to return to Martinique in order to meet Villeneuve and combine with him in the larger operations which Napoleon's instructions enjoined. The damage he had done was considerable. The ransoms

and thirty-three prizes actually produced £40,000, but this of course did not nearly cover the cost of the expedition, and the British position in the Leeward Islands remained unshaken.

To the French authorities the most galling point in that position was the Diamond Rock, a desert islet that rose in a rugged cone barely a mile from the south-west point of Martinique. Its strategical importance was out of all proportion to its size. Not only did it lie upon the direct route from Europe to Fort de France and St. Pierre, the political and commercial capitals of the colony, but it also broke the coastwise line of communication between those places and the rich southern and western districts from which they were supplied. When in 1803 Commodore Samuel Hood, with his broad pennant in the *Centaur*, was blockading Martinique, the rock had proved a serious hindrance, since the coastwise traffic was constantly escaping his cruisers by stealing inshore of it. The French regarded its splintered, surf-beaten shore and precipitous escarpments as inaccessible, but Hood did not, at least not for his "Centaurs." He resolved to possess it, and use it as a "block ship" and as a base for his inshore boat operations. He tried, and by miraculous skill in a few hours the thing was done. "Were you to see," wrote an eye-witness during the subsequent proceedings, "how along a dire and, I had almost said, a perpendicular acclivity, the sailors are hanging in clusters hauling up a four-and-twenty pounder by hawsers, you would wonder! They appear like mice hauling a little sausage. . . . Believe me, I shall never take off my hat for anything less than a British seaman." High aloft they created and armed an inaccessible fastness, and below made a little battery at the landing-place. Lieutenant Maurice of the *Centaur* was placed in charge with the rank of commander, and the islet was officially rated in the Navy List as "His Majesty's Sloop,

Diamond Rock." Here for two years the little garrison of a hundred men had lived in pure enjoyment a Robinson Crusoe life amongst the caves, incessantly raiding and cutting out, and proving an unendurable thorn in the side of Martinique.[1]

The harassed French governor, unable to touch it, had been counting on its reduction when Missiessy and Villeneuve should meet at Fort de France. But by the time Missiessy got back from his expedition to the northward, a frigate had arrived with news that Villeneuve's first attempt to get out had failed, that the combination was cancelled, and that the Rochefort squadron was to return to France. In Missiessy's eyes this meant he was to return immediately. In vain the governor entreated him to devote a fragment of his force to the Diamond Rock before he left. In spite of his vehement protests Missiessy refused, and forthwith sailed away in accordance with his programme to throw the last of his troops and supplies into St. Domingo, as he passed on homeward-bound.

With Missiessy's premature departure the great combination on which Napoleon was staking his success received its first serious blow. From the outset Napoleon had been uneasy that something of the kind might happen, and when, on receiving Austria's submission, he found himself compelled to resume the invasion he had sent a revocation of Missiessy's order to return. Villeneuve was to try again, and Missiessy was to remain and meet him. The order did not reach Missiessy in time to stop him. Indeed, as soon as Napoleon heard Villeneuve had left Toulon, he realised that this would probably happen, and he set about constructing the first of those interminable modifications of his plans which ended not only in reducing his Admirals to a state of helpless bewilderment as to what he really expected

[1] *Naval Chronicle*, xii. 205, and ix. 201, where there is a sketch of the Rock.

them to do, but also in leaving his own mind in serious confusion as to what orders he had actually given, and what they had actually received.

It was on April 11th—the day after the junction at Cadiz was effected—that he drafted the new plan. As yet he had heard nothing of Villeneuve beyond the fact that he had left Toulon, but he did know that Ganteaume had failed to get out and that Missiessy would probably be on his way home. Having therefore to face the probability that his first combination would break down, he fell back on the discredited plan of getting a surprise command of the Channel by Villeneuve's fleet alone, and began to paint another of his rose-coloured pictures. He assumed that Gravina would join at Cadiz with eight of the line, and there were two more just ready for sea at Rochefort under Admiral Magon. These he would send out direct to Martinique, if Ganteaume failed to get out by May 10th. Villeneuve's fleet would thus be brought up to twenty-two of the line, a force sufficient to enable him to return round the north of Scotland into the North Sea, set free Marmont's corps and the Dutch squadron in the Texel, and come on to Boulogne.

His reasons for believing this plan feasible are a striking example of how entirely he failed to fathom either the subtlety or the strength of British strategy. Villeneuve, he assured himself, would meet no force sufficiently strong to oppose him, because Ganteaume would always detain a squadron of twenty of the line before Brest, and Missiessy's return would absorb another squadron to blockade him in Rochefort.[1] How hopeless it was to force the British government to keep such a force before Brest we have already seen, and events were to show that no squadron in Rochefort could tempt Barham to weaken unduly the central point.

[1] Desbrière, iv. 507.

Sanguine as was the scheme, it was too sober and narrow to sit easily on Napoleon's contempt of his enemy's ability. He did not remain constant to it for two days. By April 13th he had an entirely new plan in his head. The rumour that Dominica and St. Lucia had fallen had reached him and he was more sanguine than ever. It was at this time, too, that intelligence of the feverish activity in the British naval ports, as well as of the two expeditions and of the formation of Collingwood's Flying Squadron, inflamed him with the belief that his devices had upset his enemy's equilibrium, filled their counsels with confusion, and that, in their dismay, they were scattering formidable squadrons and the best of their troops to the ends of the earth.[1]

It was, moreover, in an hour of supreme exultation that the new idea came to him. He was on his way to Italy, not too sure of how the French provinces regarded his assumption of the Imperial crown. He had reached Lyons, where, passing in state through the streets, he received an ovation. With the shouts of the adoring populace in his ears, he felt the world was his oyster and with his fleet he could open it. The possibility of securing the command of the Channel by an overpowering and unexpected concentration again took possession of him, and that night the last plan was cancelled. Instead of waiting till May 10th, Magon was to sail immediately, and carry orders to Villeneuve that if in thirty-five days from the receipt of them Ganteaume had not appeared at Martinique, he was to assume he had been unable to break out, and Villeneuve with twenty of the line, the least number which Napoleon believed he would have, was to return to Ferrol. There he would raise the blockade, call out the fifteen of the Gourdon-Grandallana squadron, and with the whole proceed

[1] Napoleon to Decrès, April 12th, and to Lauriston, Cambacérès, Talleyrand, Murat, Pino, and Decrès, April 13th: *Correspondance*, x. 312–320.

to join hands with Ganteaume off Brest. Then together they would force the Channel with an overwhelming fleet of fifty-six of the line and appear before Boulogne. There they would find the Emperor in person, who would himself give them their final orders, and "on their successful arrival," he said, "hung the destinies of the world."[1]

The new arrangement, of course, was not to come into force if Ganteaume appeared. Villeneuve was still to wait for him the specified period, but not in inactivity. The delay was to be made good by reducing St. Lucia, if it had not fallen, and such other of the British islands as were within the means and time at his disposal.[2]

That a man of Napoleon's ability should have given such orders is only to be explained by the intoxication which the success of his policy was producing. As he journeyed in triumph towards Italy, he found France worshipping at his feet, and beyond glittered within his reach the Iron Crown. Austria and Prussia were ignominiously looking on in silence at this last and most flagrant breach of his engagements, and England, his only active enemy, seemed at her wits' end. The sole merit of the new scheme above the rest is that he seems now to have faced for the first time the real conditions of the problem. It appears to contemplate winning a road across the Channel by battle. Yet he does not realise—and here lay its most vital defect —that the battle off Brest must be fought by Villeneuve alone, and that to escape defeat he must come in overwhelming force. He still believes, for all that Ganteaume and Decrès can say, that Ganteaume will be able to co-operate, as though it were a case of two armies which he could move as he would. Moreover, in spite of the tremendous difficulty of the task, in spite of the paramount

[1] Napoleon to Lauriston, April 13th, and to Villeneuve and Decrès, April 14th: *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 321.
[2] Decrès to Villeneuve, April 17th: Desbrière, vol. iv. p. 513.

necessity of concentration of effort, he bids Villeneuve squander his force prematurely in attempting colonial conquest; and to complete the perversity of it all he assumes throughout that his enemy will do all the foolish things he wishes him to do. Surely never was a project more contrary to the principles we are accustomed to call Napoleonic.[1]

It must further be remembered that these ambitious orders were signed before Napoleon had a word of news as to how Villeneuve had fared after leaving Toulon, or of what Nelson was doing. They left Paris for Rochefort on April 17th. It was not till the 20th that Napoleon, who had just reached Italy, heard from Genoa that Nelson, as late as April 10th, was still south of Sardinia and not in pursuit.[2] Two days later came news from Spain that on the same day on which the new idea had come to him, Villeneuve had safely effected a junction with Gravina at Cadiz and had gone on his way. It was a disappointment that only five Spanish ships had joined instead of the eight he had expected, but he immediately set about providing the remaining ships of his ally with a fresh part to play. Still with sanguine infatuation building on the presumed folly of his enemy, he was convinced that, as Nelson was not in pursuit of Villeneuve, he had been again enticed to Egypt. More elated than ever with the prospects of his new plan, he determined to secure his advantage by measures which would hold Nelson in the Mediterranean. For this purpose he would form a new Toulon squadron. We have seen how his first idea for using Missiessy, if he should miss his last orders and return, had been to keep him in Rochefort to occupy a blockading squadron. Now he was minded to bring him to Toulon and to persuade the Spanish Government to let their Cartagena squadron join him there.

[1] For this, see Desbrière, iv. 517

[2] Desbrière, iv. 518.

Godoy, Prince of the Peace, was then all powerful at Madrid, and Talleyrand was instructed to approach him on the subject of the new combined squadron. "My intention," Napoleon wrote, "would not be to order the squadron out, but to make it a menace, and as I shall have there [at Toulon] a camp of four or five thousand men, I shall cause the English great uneasiness. If the Prince of the Peace will not adopt this course, then I think the Cartagena squadron ought to go to Cadiz."[1] For his purpose of drawing the attention of the British to the Mediterranean the alternative of a squadron at Cadiz, controlling the entrance to the Straits, had almost as high a diversionary value as a new Toulon squadron. To increase the effect of what he hoped for, while waiting for an answer, he industriously scattered through the European press reports that Villeneuve had evaded the British watch and had landed ten thousand men in Egypt.

By such transparent devices he could think to beguile Nelson and give Villeneuve and Gravina a free hand. Decrès was therefore directed to send them ampler and more explicit orders for attempting the conquest of the British Leeward Islands. They were to expel the English, not only from Dominica and St. Lucia, but from St. Vincent, Antigua, and Barbadoes as well, and possibly even to recapture Tobago and Trinidad.[2] Never did even the elder Pitt in his most sanguine moments devise a programme so entirely unrelated to the time and force available.

If the fault which Napoleon most severely reprehended in his Marshals was that of making for themselves pictures favourable to the enemy, his own besetting naval sin was making pictures favourable to himself. The one over which he was now gloating represented England trembling for

[1] Napoleon to Talleyrand, and same to Decrès, April 23rd: *Correspondance*, x. 338-9. Same to same, May 4th: *Ibid.*, p. 375.

[2] Napoleon to Decrès, April 23rd: *Correspondance*, x. 339-341, and Desbrière, iv. 522.

India, Cochrane half-way there, and Nelson, with his eye on the French corps at Taranto, devoting himself to the defence of Egypt. The West Indies he saw defenceless till such time as a British force superior to Villeneuve's squadron could be detached from the Home Fleet. The picture was false in every line, but Napoleon would not see it, and hard on the heels of Magon, who sailed with the earlier orders on May 1st, the *Didon* frigate carried the new ones, bidding Villeneuve and Gravina oust the English from the West Indies as a *hors d'œuvre* to the full meal that was spread for them in the Channel.

Having thus taken the first steps which his unreal picture suggested, he produced in the following week an equally sanguine plan for Villeneuve's final move on England. It was elaborated in every detail, and every detail was rose-coloured. He did not know Magon had already sailed. The Iron Crown of Italy which he was about to set on his head had filled the measure of his intoxication; time and space were ceasing to exist; the wilderness of ocean over which he was scattering his squadrons was but a chessboard on which he could move them as he would, to the utter confusion of a purblind and nerveless adversary.

For the final movement, as he now formulated it, temporary command of the Channel by surprise still had a place, beside the idea of real command, won in a great and decisive action. Villeneuve, after he had returned to raise the Ferrol blockade and had formed his junction with Gourdon and Grandallana, would be left free to choose the method that seemed best at the last moment. Napoleon still believed that all that was wanted was three, or on second thoughts four, days' command before Boulogne. Villeneuve might gain it either by joining Ganteaume or by leaving him to occupy the main British squadron and going north-about to take the enemy's position in reverse down the

North Sea. It was not unlikely that the British Admiralty would direct its chief attention to preventing a junction between the Brest and Toulon squadrons and would endeavour to deal with Villeneuve in detail. To this end they would probably move Cornwallis out a considerable distance to meet him. If they did, it would only facilitate his operating by surprise. Instead of approaching Brest he could run round Cornwallis, make the Lizard, and from there rush the Channel, or if the wind were not favourable he could go north-about to the Texel. If, however, he decided on joining Ganteaume and a battle, he could either previously bring out the Rochefort squadron on his way to Ushant or leave it where it was to occupy its own blockading squadron. If possible he was not to fight till the junction with Ganteaume was complete, but if a preliminary action could not be avoided, he was to fight as near to Brest as possible, so as to permit of Ganteaume's co-operation. Lastly, in case events prevented any of these plans succeeding, he could fetch out the Rochefort squadron and concentrate with the Cartagena squadron at Cadiz for further orders.[1]

It was an ingenious method of breaking the strength of the interior position held as of old by our Western Squadron. But as before it was the design of a soldier, framed on the lines of land warfare and the movement of armies. Its fatal defect was, as we shall see Decrès presently pointing out, that it made no deductions either for the superior mobility of fleets and the peculiar limitations of that mobility imposed by conditions of wind and tide. In short, so far as it rested on a junction between Villeneuve and Ganteaume, it was a plan based on the false analogy of an army relieving a beleaguered garrison. If we are investing a fortress it is always possible for the two sections of the enemy's force to co-operate to a greater or less extent, but

[1] For all the above orders, see Desbrière, iv. iii., chapters 7 and 9.

there is no recorded case in sailing days of a blockaded squadron having been able to take effective part in an action between a relieving force and the blockaders.[1] The difficulty was partly due to the fact that a wind that was favourable for the relieving force to attack was usually foul for the blockaded force to come out; and partly to the fact that if the blockading force moved away to meet the attack and left the port open, still the difficulty which the blockaded force always had in locating the blockaders, if out of sight of its signal stations, prevented its moving out except at great hazard until it actually heard the engagement in progress. Napoleon, in short, omitted from his calculations two primary conditions of naval warfare; one—that at sea there was a lee and a weather gage which did not enter into analogous problems on land, and the other, that it is impossible to tell under a day or two whether a naval blockade has been raised or not.

So things stood when on May 20th midnight sounded the knell of the West Indian concentration, and the new orders for a concentration in home waters came into operation. This was the day Napoleon had finally fixed as the latest on which Ganteaume was to attempt to break out, and henceforth the door was shut on him till Villeneuve should appear to open it. With that Napoleon had to rest content so far as Brest was concerned; but for Missiessy's squadron to remain idle was another matter, and since the Spanish refusal to accept his idea of a new Toulon squadron his restless mind was at work again on schemes for putting it to the best advantage. He had just heard from Spain, that the Government had decided the Cartagena squadron must come to Cadiz. The reason is curious. If the British Government were at a loss to fathom the meaning of Missi-

[1] For a typical example of what would happen should such co-operation be attempted, see the case of Badiley, Appleton, and Van Galen at Leghorn in 1653: *England in the Mediterranean*, i. 265 *et seq.*

essy's unexpected return, the Spanish Government had a knot still more difficult to untie, and much more disturbing. For them the dominating fact was that Nelson had appeared at the Straits at the moment when Craig had reached Lisbon. Craig they knew was now waiting at Gibraltar, but where was Nelson? On what was he bent? As Godoy remarked to the French ambassador, the answer to this question was nothing to the Emperor but everything to Spain. Nelson had last been heard of off St. Vincent. He was thus a month behind Villeneuve and pursuit could scarcely lead to anything. Clearly Spain must be prepared for a blow at one of her arsenals—probably Caraccas in Cadiz Bay. Salcedo and his squadron must come round from Cartagena for its defence, and this would be done so soon as they knew where Nelson was and that the passage through the Straits was clear.[1]

Napoleon was equally perplexed as to the meaning of Craig's expedition, but less disturbed. As usual he decided it was going to do what would most nicely suit his plans. "The famous secret expedition," he wrote to Decrès, "put into Lisbon on May 7th, and sailed again on the 10th. It is composed of two ships of the line, a corvette and fifty transports carrying 5000 to 6000 men. It seems to have taken refuge in Lisbon for fear of Villeneuve. Where is it going? It is a problem. My opinion is that it has nothing in reason to do except to take the Cape or to carry assistance to Jamaica or the Windward Islands.[2] If it is destined for Malta, so much the better. Nothing will prove more strongly the ineptitude of the English Cabinet; for these plans of continental operations based on detachments of a few thousand men are the plans of pygmies. If then you hear that this expedition has gone to Malta, rejoice; for

[1] Beurnonville (French ambassador at Madrid) to Talleyrand, May 14th and 16th: Desbrière, iv. 578–81.

[2] *i.e.* the Lesser Antilles, in English official parlance the "Leeward Islands." See *England in the Seven Years' War*, i. 352.

the English have deprived themselves of 6000 men and of a certain number of ships. All the reports I get from England agree in saying that the English are embarking troops on all sides." [1]

This criticism of Pitt's strategy has been taken as Napoleon's real opinion, and even as a condemnation of that amphibious form of war which had become characteristic of British methods. But such an interpretation is by no means certain. To begin with, no one familiar with his correspondence can have failed to notice a habit he had of branding movements which he had not foreseen as *inepties* or *sottises*, and the more disconcerting such movements were, the more contemptuous was his language. His success and self-confidence seem to have brought him to a state of mind, in which he could not or would not believe his own appreciations could have missed any reasonable eventuality; and if an opposing commander acted in a way which he himself had failed to anticipate, the only explanation he permitted was that the man was a fool and a blunderer. Such a process of thought was but a piece of the perverse self-deception which was probably his greatest defect as a commander. In this case it is unusually striking; for in a month or two, as we shall see, he was speaking of the expedition in a tone of serious alarm. Moreover the letters should not be read alone. Those he wrote on the same and the following day, suggest that his real feeling was one far removed from contempt.

They were the two busy days which preceded the ceremony of his coronation at Milan, and over the pageantry of the preparations there is clear to see the shadow of Pitt's coming coalition, the first doubt as to whether the initiative of the campaign is to be his own. On the eve of his great

[1] Napoleon to Decrès, May 25th and June 8th. Napoleon wrote: "Ces combinaisons de mouvements du continent, fondées sur des détachements de quelques 1000 hommes, sont des combinaisons de pygmies."

stroke for incorporating Italy in his empire, which had already caused him so much misgiving, he sat pouring out despatch after despatch, filled with new anxiety. To Marshal Berthier, his Chief of the Staff, there are two for reinforcing and rearming Corsica and his chief Italian ports. To Cambacérès, his right hand in Paris, he writes: "You can contradict loudly the news that is being spread of a treaty of alliance between England and Russia. Make it known indirectly on 'Change and elsewhere that Russia, on the contrary, has refused to listen to any hostile proposals." Fouché, who controlled the press bureau, is told to insert in the papers that at St. Petersburg the French are growing more popular, that the English are disliked, that the project of a coalition has fallen through, and that in any case Russia will not intervene and is too remote to engage on her own account directly and effectively. "Be careful," he tells Barbè-Marbois, "to read the English papers, and to get them by the quickest way. Do not stop at a thousand louis more or less and send me such information as may interest me, above all the movements of ships and announcements of all preparations of all expeditions." "Monsieur mon Beaufrere et Cousin," he writes testily to Prince Murat, "what you write me about the conclusion of a treaty of alliance between England and Russia is nonsense: it is entirely false. These reports, which the English spread to get themselves out of the mess for the moment, are fabrications." In the evening, after the fireworks and illuminations were over, he was even haunted with the possibility of his enemy playing their old game of supporting insurrections in France itself: and he wrote again to Fouché: "In the state of disorganisation and embarrassment in which England finds herself, it is possible she may seek to renew trouble in the interior of France. But I can't think she will make much of it. That string is worn out like so many others."

It is possible that his orders for strengthening the Italian

ports had their origin in a desire to provide secure points of refuge for a small frigate squadron he was about to send out for a cruise under his wayward brother Jerome, who had just returned from his escapade in America and in whom he hoped to find the Admiral he was seeking. But all the rest of the letters suggest strongly that the meeting of Craig's expedition and Nelson gave an ugly turn to the growing rumours of an Anglo-Russian alliance, and that for the first time Napoleon was forced to doubt whether his invasion threat would so effectively paralyse British initiative as he had expected.

On the morrow his preoccupation with Craig at Gibraltar and the possibility of English and Russian co-operation in the Mediterranean continues. "It is urgent," he writes, "to get the Cartagena fleet to Cadiz and to blockade Gibraltar, if the English do not keep a superior squadron in those seas;" and yet again to Fouché: "I have already told you that the treaty of England with Russia is false. It is a trick of the English Cabinet. Their intrigues have broken down completely. Even when you see this treaty printed in the English gazette and Pitt announcing it to Parliament, you can say it is not true." The same day he hears that the British fleet before Brest has been firing a salvo, and it gets on his nerves. He discusses it with Decrès, is afraid it may mean a regrettable incident for Magon, and he ends by assuring the Minister that "England is entirely abandoned by the continent, her situation is worse than ever."[1]

To add to his troubles he could get no news of Missiessy. He had not yet heard of his return. As the Spanish fear of Craig had ended all hope of a new Toulon squadron, he had decided to send him back to Villeneuve. But as the

[1] For the above letters of May 25th to 28th, see *Correspondance de Napoléon*, x. 441–454. The salvo was probably fired on news of Prevost's repulse of the attack on Dominica.

days went by the probability of his being too late or even shut in by blockade grew more and more disturbing, and Napoleon began deluging Decrès with projects for using him in some other way. In spite of "the state of disorganisation and embarrassment" in England, everywhere he looked he saw a British squadron in the way. The problem was how to employ Missiessy so as to occupy or entice away an equal British force and yet have him at hand at the decisive moment. "If I send Missiessy to Cadiz or to Toulon," he wrote to Decrès on May 29th, "and the English evacuate the Mediterranean, it is evident the English will have on the day of the battle of Ushant, six more vessels against me, which I ought to make Missiessy contain." There was, to be sure, the possibility of sending him to Cadiz to fetch the Cartagena and Cadiz squadrons to Ferrol, but to this course there were two objections. He believed Calder had ten of the line before Ferrol, and Missiessy, if he succeeded in rallying both the Cadiz and the Cartagena squadrons, would have fifteen. "But is it prudent," he says, "to attack ten English vessels with five French and ten Spanish?" Moreover a concentration at Ferrol, like all concentrations at the wrong time and place, would do more harm than good. It would attract at least twenty of the enemy, and then Villeneuve would be unable to get there without fighting and the difficulty of the Brest junction would be reproduced. For the same reason he could not send him to Brest, for even if he could slip in, that again would only lead to an increase of the British force at the mouth of the Channel—the force, that is, which it was his special object to reduce. There was no way, he finally decided, but for Missiessy to operate an independent diversion. If he was blockaded in Rochefort he would occupy at least six of the enemy, and could conform to their movements. If on Villeneuve's approach the blockade was raised he must go out and make a demonstration on

the coast of Ireland. "This movement," he writes, "will give London a fit of nerves (*la crispation*) and oblige them to detach six of the line." Meanwhile Missiessy would disappear into the ocean and turn up off Ferrol in time to meet Villeneuve.

As further reports began to reach Milan of the rapid succession of orders that had been issuing from the British Admiralty since Villeneuve's escape, the picture which Napoleon was painting for himself gained in colour. "The disorder of the English is extreme," he wrote to Decrès. But if Napoleon deceived himself Decrès had his eyes open, and on June 1st he sat down to warn his sanguine master of the serious mistakes he was making. "What seems certain," he wrote with grave sarcasm, "is that, if the English Government has not divined your Majesty's thoughts, it is none the less true that they have been penetrated by the London journalists."[1] He felt sure Cochrane had not gone to India, but was in the West Indies, and he warns Napoleon that if Nelson goes there too they will have together eighteen of the line, "of which several are three-deckers," and that a premature action there is highly probable. "The low speed of some of Admiral Villeneuve's vessels," he argues, "leaves little hope that he will be able to avoid an engagement. On this hypothesis the die is cast, and a fortnight hence the God of Battles will have given judgment." Even on the other hypothesis that Cochrane was not there and Villeneuve might get away without fighting, his predicament would be even worse. Nelson would immediately follow him back, "and if he despairs of reaching Ferrol in time, he will send thither a fast frigate, and himself make for Brest, which will give the enemy an immense force at that point."

[1] Desbrière, iv. 596. Decrès quotes the *Morning Chronicle* of May 9th and the *Sun* of the 16th. The May–June number of the *Naval Chronicle* (vol. xiii. p. 484) also published Napoleon's intention to "balayer la Manche" with sixty of the line and fight our fleet, while his frigates covered the passage of the troops.

To redress the balance Napoleon was of course relying on the junction between Villeneuve and Ganteaume being made before the "Battle of Ushant" was fought, and Decrès as delicately as he can tries to convince him the thing is impossible. "I will make no comparison," he says, "with two columns of an army, a case in which the smallest accident may often upset the most nicely calculated junction. . . . Whatever the winds on which Admiral Villeneuve makes for Brest it is possible these winds may be foul for Admiral Ganteaume's fleet. For this junction to operate with success, Admiral Villeneuve must appear before Brest at a moment favourable for the fleet to get under way." Even so it will be impossible for Villeneuve to avoid sustaining for a time single-handed the whole force of the enemy. "If Admiral Villeneuve's fleet has not force sufficient to constrain the enemy to refuse battle, he will have to measure strength with him for at least ten hours before he can be joined by the Brest fleet. The issue of such an action fought with such a proportion of vessels will leave the victor with an effective force sufficient to sustain a second attack." In other words, if all goes as well as possible, no victory can be expected to be decisive enough to give certain command of the Channel.

But he goes still further, pointing out technical reasons why it is impossible to hope that things will go so well. By no process of intelligence will it be possible to make certain that Villeneuve shall arrive when wind and tide are right for Ganteaume; in all probability, therefore, the Brest squadron would not be in a position to support Villeneuve till the day after he appears. Moreover there was a likelihood of Villeneuve's finding the enemy off Ushant in much greater strength than Napoleon has allowed for. It was quite possible they would have not merely the regular blockading squadron, but also the whole of its reserve, as well as the Ferrol squadron and eventually Nelson's too. He

reminds his master that of the whole force on which he relies to deal with such a concentration of highly trained squadrons, nineteen vessels will be Spaniards just out of harbour, commanded by inexperienced officers and poorly equipped. Finally he begs that Villeneuve may be given orders not to risk an action unless he finds his own squadron in a superiority of at least six to that of the enemy.[1]

It is doubtful whether this luminous appreciation, with its first forecast of what actually happened, was ever completed. A curious feature of it is that though Decrès clearly did not put much trust in Nelson's being enticed away, yet he dared not say openly that he was not the simpleton Napoleon professed to think him. Still he felt bound to hint that it was just possible Nelson might do the right thing, and he adopted a method of conveying the suggestion, which was as ingenious as it was delicate. "His boasting," he says, "only equals his ineptitude (*ineptie*)—and I use here the proper word—but he has one striking quality, which is to have no pretensions with his captains except for bravery and luck; whence it follows that he is accessible to advice, and in difficult situations, though he is nominally in command, it is another who actually directs."[2]

Whether or not Decrès ever ventured to forward his crushing criticism, it certainly had no effect in shaking Napoleon's obstinacy. A week later he reproved his minister for not having "a mind exclusive enough for a

[1] Desbrière, iv. 596. This document is an unfinished draft.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 599. Colonel Desbrière observes on this remarkable paper, "In all but what concerns the gross error in appreciating the character of Nelson, we cannot admire too much this letter whose forecasts were realised with almost absolute precision." Colonel Desbrière would seem therefore to take Decrès' remarks on Nelson seriously; but it is submitted that there really seems no reason to do so. It is almost impossible to believe that a man who could expose in so masterly a manner the strategical fallacies of Napoleon and penetrate so acutely the British intentions, could really be so bad a judge of the main personal factor. The awe in which Napoleon's officers stood of him, seems quite enough to account for Decrès' preferring not to contradict the Emperor's shallow view of Nelson's capacity, if there was another and safer way of attaining the end which he had in view.

great operation." "It is a fault," he said, "which you must correct, for it is the art of great successes and great undertakings." Decrès in despair begged him to come back to France. "I don't know," Napoleon replied, "why you say so much of my return to Paris. Nothing is better calculated than my journey to hide my projects and cheat the enemy." Always this besetting dream of his enemy's imbecility! Unconvinced he continued incessantly to elaborate his plan, in spite of news that kept coming in to show how airy was the castle he was building.

Salcedo had tried to get round to Cadiz in order to attack Craig at Gibraltar, but had been forced by the weather to put back and was now held in his port on rumours that both Orde and Nelson were in the neighbourhood. The falsity of the rumours was not penetrated by Napoleon. He embraced them to add colour to his picture. For him they meant a further chance of weakening his enemy on the Ushant position. Missiessy could now be sent to make a demonstration in the North Sea and off the Texel, and Marmont should emphasise it by such a display of activity ashore as would compel the British Government to take it into account. The basis of it all was pure illusion. It was quickly demonstrated that owing to the strength of the British interior position between Cadiz and Cartagena it was impossible for the two squadrons either to get together or between them to contain a force superior to their own. In a week Salcedo tried once more to get round to Cadiz, but only to hurry into port again in alarm, on tidings that Collingwood had arrived to re-establish the command of the Straits' mouth.[1]

Still nothing availed to dilute Napoleon's optimism, or his belief that he had completely confused his enemy and broken their concentration. He had heard that a Flying Squadron of twelve of the line had been detached from

[1] Beurnonville to Talleyrand, June 13th and 17th: *Ibid.*, p. 622.

the Ushant fleet, and till the actual announcement that Collingwood was blockading Cadiz he believed he had gone to India. As to Nelson he was equally sanguine. Though he did not know where he was for certain, he had little doubt he was either in England or the Mediterranean, and was convinced that Missiessy's cruise would complete his effort to upset the equilibrium of his enemy. "The uncertainty and confusion," he repeated, "that the London Admiralty is in, declares itself on all sides. Orders and counter-orders and the greatest indecision—that is the actual state of things."[1]

Yet even as he wrote, these orders and counter-orders over which he was exulting had brought, not confusion, but the quiet re-establishment of the long line of blockade which Villeneuve's escape had thrown momentarily out of gear. So nicely adjusted was the interlocking of the parts, so well practised the hands at the levers, that every uncertainty had been met by a simple turn. Each part in answer to the adroit impulse slipped smartly into its appointed place. From the Texel to Cartagena the chain was drawn tight and every gate was locked upon the impotent squadrons of which Napoleon had yet to construct a fleet.

[1] To Decrès, June 14th: Desbrière, iv. 612.

CHAPTER X

RESTORING THE COMMAND—FERROL AND THE STRAITS

To pass from the imaginative and almost feverish correspondence of Napoleon at this time, to the coolly calculated orders of Lord Barham and the confident motions of the British commanders gives an impression of quiet mastery that is the note of the campaign from now onwards.

Ignorant that Missiessy's reappearance was a mistake, the Admiralty's first deduction from their intelligence was that no serious attack or concentration was intended in the West Indies. It even indicated a possibility that Villeneuve was not bound thither at all, and word was immediately sent after Collingwood instructing him to go no further than Madeira without fresh orders. On the same reasoning Pitt decided not to divert Sir Eyre Coote's expedition to the West Indies, and an express was hurried off to Drury, who in Gardner's absence was commanding the Irish station, to stop him, or supposing he had started, to recall him if possible.[1] There was a possibility that Villeneuve had gone to India after all, as Napoleon was trying to make his enemy believe. But the Government was not to be enticed into making so wide a dissipation of its fleet except on the surest evidence, and they contented themselves with a warning to Sir Edward Pellew, who commanded on the station.[2]

[1] *Out-letters* (*Secret Orders*), 1363, May 30th.

[2] *Ibid.*, June 4th. He was told they had intelligence of the Toulon squadron having left Cadiz on April 10th, and that "though very imperfect it increases the probability of its destination being for the East Indies or the Cape of Good Hope." An earlier warning to the same effect had been sent him.

The discretion which Gardner had exercised in withholding Graves's division from Collingwood received formal approval, and he was directed to devote it to the blockade of Rochefort, with instructions to intercept the French squadron if it put to sea and to follow it wherever it went. Gardner received the order on June 5th, when Collingwood had been gone a fortnight. Decrès had just heard of this weakening of the Ushant fleet, and seeing in it a chance for Ganteaume to strike, was appealing to the Emperor for the necessary orders. But Napoleon would not quit the plan which seemed to be working so well. He was the last man in the world, for all his faith in the principle of destroying the enemy's forces, to hazard an action except for some clearly seen end. "To what can a battle lead?" he replied. "To nothing. Simply put in the papers that the English have sent eight (*sic*) of the line before [Rochefort] and that they have weakened by so much their Brest blockade . . . and that it is inconceivable why the French fleet does not profit by the occasion. Next day, in another paper, say that it is most extraordinary that journalists permit themselves such reflexions; that before condemning or approving the conduct of an admiral in an affair of this nature, they should know what are his instructions, and that probably, as the Emperor has not communicated them to the journalists, all their talk on the subject is quite futile."[1]

The prompt closing of Rochefort reduced all his schemes for the employment of Missiessy to the *pis aller* of conforming to the movements of the blockading force. But in any case the squadron could not have sailed for some weeks—so exhausted were its crews, and so great the need of repairs—and a fortnight after Missiessy had put into the port, Graves had appeared. With his own 80-gun ship, two three-deckers, and three others, he was in a marked superiority

[1] To Decrès, June 16th.

over what the enemy was reputed to have. Thus by the time Napoleon knew Missiessy was back he was already firmly held to his moorings. Graves indeed, on his arrival, found the squadron so entirely unfit for sea that he forthwith submitted to Gardner whether it was necessary to keep anything but a frigate off the port. Gardner replied—and the point is interesting in relation to the old practice of war direction—that he did not feel authorised to recall him or any part of his detachment without special orders from the Admiralty. The orders he got were to withdraw two ships of the line and to add them to his own squadron or to that of Calder before Ferrol.

The position of this squadron had been causing Gardner some anxiety. Calder had been complaining that his force was inadequate to watch the port. Besides his own three-decker, the *Prince of Wales*, he had only an 80-gun ship, four seventy-fours, and a forty-four, while Gourdon and Grandallana had between them eleven of the line actually ready for sea, and three more in a forward state. To add to the inequality, one of Calder's ships had been severely damaged aloft, and four others would soon need relief. So strongly did Gardner feel Calder's weakness that it had been his intention to send him the whole of Graves's division. This addition to the Ferrol squadron, after the units requiring refit had been sent home, would have given it a strength of ten of the line, of which three would be three-deckers, besides an 80-gun ship—a force which by the ordinary rule of calculation would have made it superior to the Combined Squadron inside. The Admiralty order to attach Graves to Collingwood and subsequently to send him before Rochefort had stopped the movement, and made it impossible for Gardner to detach anything to Calder without bringing his own squadron below the established minimum of eighteen.

His anxiety, however, was needless. Barham was quite

alive to the situation and had already provided for it. The nature of these orders and the manner in which they were interpreted by the Admirals concerned, are highly interesting. They afford a typical example of what long war experience had established as to the discretion which the man on the spot might permit himself in reading his orders, and the certainty and fearlessness with which officers in those days could weigh the spirit against the letter.

It will be remembered that Barham's first idea after hearing of Villeneuve's escape was that Knight's two vessels the *Queen* and *Dragon*, which formed Craig's escort, should proceed with Collingwood's Flying Squadron in chase, if Nelson had not gone himself. If Nelson had pursued, Knight was to send both vessels to Orde, who was then believed to be still on his station. This was on April 27th. Three days later came Orde's despatch which told of his falling back on Ushant, and contained his appreciation, which pointed to the probability of a concentration of the enemy's squadrons somewhere to the westward. To hold the Ferrol position in strength was therefore of the last importance, and it became absolutely necessary to reinforce Calder. Consequently, it will be remembered, Knight was instructed that if he had not passed St. Vincent with his convoy, he was to come back to Ferrol. If he had, he was to shift his flag to a frigate at Gibraltar and send his ships of the line to Calder, or if Calder had raised the blockade they were to carry on to Gardner.

The first of these orders Knight received when he reached Gibraltar. By that time Nelson had already detached Sir Richard Bickerton in the *Royal Sovereign*, and had placed Knight under his orders. Bickerton of course decided, as Nelson was pursuing, to keep Knight's ships with his flag. His intention was, in accordance with Nelson's instructions, to use the squadron for covering Craig's passage to Malta and meeting a Levant convoy then due. He informed

the Admiralty that in taking upon himself to do this instead of sending the ships to Orde as they had directed, he was influenced by the dominant consideration, that when the Admiralty issued the orders they did not know that the squadron in Cartagena had become active, and had already once been to sea. The whole tenor of the order indicated that had they known this they would certainly have wished Craig's escort to remain for his protection. Before, however, he could act, the second orders arrived, as to reinforcing Calder; whereupon Bickerton considered he was no longer justified in using his discretion in the light of the local situation. "I must give up," he replied, "the objects I had and obey, though it will expose the convoy and transports to the [Algeçiras] gunboats and the Cartagena squadron. As I certainly am not strong enough to meet and attack this force advantageously, backed as it is by the Cadiz squadron, which must amount to five of the line . . . I do not feel myself at liberty to deviate from their lordships' orders when there is no reasonable hope of my being able by an action with such a superior enemy to confine the Cartagena squadron within the Straits, or to prevent the junction of at least the larger part of them with that of Cadiz; and when it is considered that their lordships' future arrangements will be made under a full conviction that the ships of the line under my orders have joined the squadron under Sir Robert Calder or Lord Gardner's fleet." His principle may be thus enunciated—that in dealing with explicit orders no exercise of discretion that may confuse the war-plan is permissible to an officer on the spot, unless he sees in the local conditions, unknown to headquarters, the certainty of delivering a decisive blow at the enemy's naval force or possibly of paralysing a part of it greater than his own.[1]

[1] *In-letters*, 410, Bickerton to the Admiralty, May 14th and 16th. Knight to same, May 15th. Bickerton's last letter is minuted, "Approve his proceedings under the circumstances he describes."

The decision was one which called for the highest qualities of a commander. In obeying his orders in spite of his knowledge of the local situation, he was exposing an important military force to present risk of being destroyed by a combined attack from Cadiz, Cartagena, and Algeçiras. Fortunately, in the General he had to deal with a man of as high and sound a military spirit as his own. Directly he received the orders he showed them to Craig, and Craig in spite of the dangers staring him in the face agreed there was but one thing for Bickerton to do. To make the position perfectly clear, he sent home a despatch to the War Office to assure them Bickerton's conduct to him throughout had been "most confidential and cordial." Of his departure with the squadron he had not a word of complaint. "His doing so," he says, "is with my perfect concurrence and acquiescence." Though he well knew the Admiralty despatch had been written without information of how large and active was the enemy's force about the Straits, yet he did not feel justified in pressing Bickerton on that account to vary his orders. The view he took was that all the instructions which the Admirals had communicated to him had a certain "general tendency," and this, he said, was "invariably that of assembling a great naval force to the westward, an object which under the present circumstances might be of a magnitude to supersede every other."

No utterance could more clearly reveal how intimate at that time was the sympathy between the best men in the two services and how complete was their mutual understanding of the principles of combined warfare. Faced as Craig was with the prospect of his force being left almost without defence in seas swarming with the enemy, he did not forget that for England there was one condition of affairs to which everything else must be subservient. In the Admiralty orders he perceived indications that the moment was at hand for a supreme decision in a great fleet action,

at the vital strategical point. If so it was a moment for which everything, even his own force, must be risked; and he did not flinch. Not even by a word would he tempt his colleague from the supreme duty.[1] On the morrow, May 17th, Bickerton sailed with his three ships for Ferrol, leaving Knight in command at Gibraltar to make such dispositions as he could with the few cruisers and gunboats available for the safety of the convoy and the observation of Cartagena.

Ten days later, as Bickerton neared Finisterre, he met Collingwood coming down with his nine ships of the line and a frigate, and was able to place him in possession of the actual state of affairs. Collingwood, as we know, had been given a wide discretion as to the disposal of his own force. The two Admirals held a long consultation, and had little difficulty in coming to a conclusion as to how far Collingwood's orders might be modified to meet the local conditions. From Bickerton Collingwood learnt that Nelson with only ten of the line was in chase of Villeneuve with eighteen. He also learnt the important new fact that both in Cadiz and Cartagena there were active squadrons. Seeing the comparative strength of Nelson and Villeneuve, and that Cochrane had no more than six of the line, he ought by his orders to have despatched two of the line after Nelson to bring the whole naval force in the Leeward Islands up to eighteen also. But in view of the fact that since his orders were received Missiessy had returned and that the enemy's force in the West Indies was thereby reduced by five ships, he decided not to do so till further orders. Bickerton's urgent representation convinced him that the situation demanded taking his whole force down to the

[1] Craig to Lord Camden, May 16th: *W. O.* (1), *In-letters*, 280. All Craig's despatches go to confirm the judgment of his enthusiastic young admirer, Ensign Charles Boothby. "The name of my new chief I had long known; for his fine person and dark flashing eye had been pointed out to me when a boy as belonging to the finest officer in the service."—*Under England's Flag*, p. 8.

Straits to secure the local command. "In view," Collingwood wrote home, "of the active preparations in Cartagena and Cadiz and that a convoy is expected from Malta I shall proceed off Cadiz with the utmost despatch . . . and take station there." He hoped their lordships would approve this departure from his orders, since the activity at Cartagena was unknown when they were drawn up. "I consider," he concluded, "the spirit of my orders demanded that I should not leave so large a force at liberty to sail in execution of their plans." Here then was a clear case of modifying explicit orders. They were not merely "instructions"; and Collingwood's despatch bears the Admiralty endorsement, "Approved under the circumstances."[1]

In consideration of Collingwood's consent to take this course, Bickerton sacrificed his only cruiser to inform the Admiralty. The despatches of the two Admirals were received on June 8th and instantly orders were returned to them fully accepting their view of the situation. Bickerton, who in obedience to his orders had gone on to Ferrol, was to shift his flag to the *Queen* and, leaving the *Royal Sovereign* and his two-decker with Calder, was to go back to the Straits and place himself under Collingwood's orders.

Collingwood thus became Commander-in-chief of the regular Mediterranean station from Cape St. Vincent to the Levant with a force of ten of the line besides the *Excellent* which was still on guard at Naples, and the strong force of cruisers which were exercising the control within the Straits. His orders were to establish a close blockade of Cadiz and of St. Lucar, the adjacent port of Seville. Hitherto, with a view apparently of conciliating neutrals, and especially Americans, a commercial blockade had not been strictly enforced. But on the urgent representations of the officers on the station of the activity in the Spanish dockyards,

[1] Bickerton to Admiralty and Collingwood to same, May 27th, off Finisterre: *In-letters*, 410.

It was high time. In his absence both Craig and Knight had been having many anxious hours. It was only the timely arrival of Collingwood, as we have seen, that saved the expedition from an attack in force by Salcedo, but even when he was scared back their troubles were by no means at an end. Across the bay they could see the Algeçiras gunboats continually increasing in numbers. Knight did his best with the small force at his command. Anchoring the convoy in close order, he covered it with the only two cruisers he had, a frigate and the *Beagle*, who had returned to her station, kept one or two gun-brigs and gunboats patrolling, and had guard-boats out at night. Campbell, the Portuguese Admiral, moreover, had come into the bay and had anchored his squadron in such a position that the Spaniards accused him of wilfully covering the transports from attack. He certainly kept Knight supplied with information to the best of his ability. By the time, however, the expedition had been thus exposed for a month things looked so threatening that it became imperative to make other dispositions. General Fox, the governor, had obtained information that an attack was intended in a few days, and that the gunboats at Algeçiras now numbered forty, besides many more at Cartagena. Together Fox and Craig laid the facts formally before Knight and a joint council was held. The Admiral suggested taking the whole convoy to sea, and offered to hoist his flag in the frigate for its protection, if the Generals would give him a detachment of troops to complete the companies of both his cruisers, and assist in arming some of the transports. They readily agreed, and the whole convoy was taken out of the bay to

74's, and one 64. Bickerton never called the *Excellent* to his flag. Writing to Nelson on July 30th he says: "I have not removed the *Excellent* from Naples, for besides the uncertainty I was under where to order her to meet me, I was unwilling to take a step which might have defeated your lordship's measures": *Nelson Papers, Add. MSS.* 34930. The *Excellent*, except for occasional spells under sail for drill and gunnery practice, remained at her moorings from Jan. 17, 1805, to Feb. 11, 1806.—*Log of the Excellent.*

the eastward of the Rock, where it continued standing off and on across the Gut "in delicious weather."[1]

The device entirely succeeded. The transports were well out of reach of Algeçiras, and the appearance of Collingwood off Cadiz effectually deterred any movement on the part of the Cartagena squadron. So far from thinking of offence, Salcedo was busy with harbour defences, and the flotilla of gunboats of which Fox had heard was being hastily equipped for the protection of the port. Indeed the whole attention of the Andalusian authorities was fixed on making preparations against the attack which, since Craig had put to sea, he seemed about to deliver at some undetermined point.[2]

In this situation the convoy was found by Bickerton on his return, and on June 25th, without anchoring, he led it on with a fair wind up the Straits. Hugging the African coast, he detached the *Beagle* to report what Salcedo was doing. Off Cape Tenes, well to the eastward of Cartagena, the *Beagle* rejoined, reporting Salcedo at anchor. Thereupon Knight determined to send Craig on his way under an escort of three frigates, while he himself parted company to constitute a covering squadron for the army's passage by taking station before Cartagena.[3]

So in the face of all Napoleon's active and undefeated squadrons the passage of the expedition had been secured. The first step towards Pitt's enveloping attack had been taken, and as Craig passed quietly on his way to the westward all was in labour with Napoleon's counter-stroke. The concentration for the great invasion had begun.

[1] Knight to the Admiralty, June 17th, enclosing Fox and Craig to Knight, June 13th, Fox's information, and Craig to Knight, June 15th: *In-letters*, 441. Craig to Lord Camden, June 17th: *W.O.* (1), *In-letters*, 280. Boothby, *Under England's Flag*, p. 20. Bunbury, *The Great War*, p. 189. Knight to Nelson (enclosing his journal), July 16th: *Nelson Papers*, *Add. MSS.* 34930.

[2] Beurnonville to Talleyrand, Madrid, June 18th: Desbrière, iv. 625.

[3] Bickerton to Admiralty, July 28th: *In-letters*, 411.

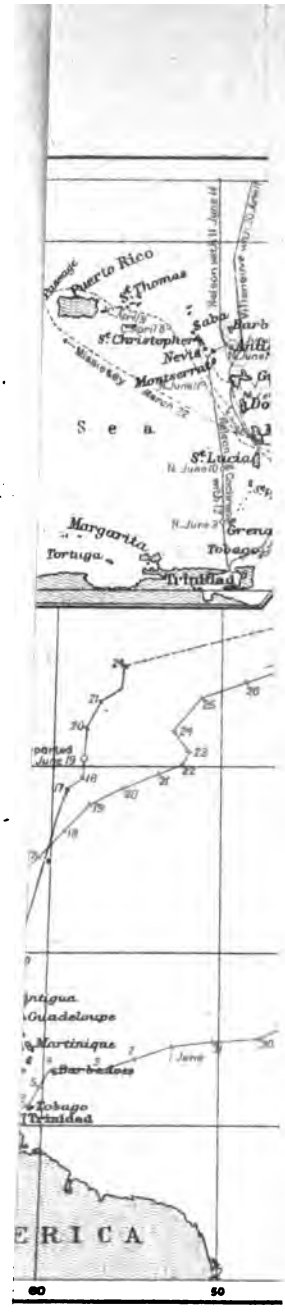
CHAPTER XI

OPERATIONS IN THE WEST INDIES

At home the last that had been heard of Nelson was as he approached Madeira, three days after he had parted company with Craig. The Admiralty had received a short note assuring them that if he had made a mistake and the Combined Squadron was not in the West Indies, he could be back again off Cadiz by the end of June before the enemy could know where he had gone, and that then he would proceed to England, leaving such a force behind him as the service required.[1] His faith in the safety of his move and the influence of an unlocated fleet was fully justified. We have seen how Napoleon believed he had not left European waters, and before the French headquarters were sufficiently assured of his departure to base any action on it, he appeared again at Gibraltar.

To Lord Camden, the Minister for War, who had asked him to give Craig his co-operation and advice, he had written a longer letter explaining the difficulties of the political situation. In his opinion—matured as it was by the practical experience of the last war—it would be a mistake for Craig to land in Sicily at once. Any such move would be the signal for a French advance on Naples. The King would certainly not consent to it. But the moment the French made a movement independently, our troops would be received with gratitude. In this advice Nelson was endorsing the Government's own view, nor had he anything

[1] To Marsden, April 14th: Nicolas, vi. 437.



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to add except once more to urge the importance of securing Sardinia.[1]

Thus the last thought they had had from him, was for the safety of the station he was leaving behind. All that man could do, indeed all that was necessary, he had done. To speak of him as having abandoned the Mediterranean is to misconceive his careful attitude. Strategically his conscience was clear, and henceforth he could absorb himself freely in what was before him to the westward.

He was already at work. During the previous days, in view of a meeting with Villeneuve's superior fleet, he had been drawing up a tactical memorandum, which he ordered Captain Parker of the *Amazon* frigate to distribute to the fleet on May 15th.[2] The nature of this memorandum is quite uncertain. Clarke and McArthur believed it to be one they saw amongst Lord St. Vincent's papers, and Sir Harris Nicolas in his collection of Nelson's letters followed them. But the document was undated and there are insuperable difficulties in assigning it to this occasion. Internal evidence shows that when Nelson drafted the document he was contemplating an action against a fleet of eleven or twelve sail with a force about equal to it: but now he had before him the prospect of engaging a much larger squadron with inferior numbers. "I am going," he had written to Acton a few days before, "to the West Indies where the enemy have twenty-four sail of the line: my force is very very inferior. I only take ten with me and I only expect to be joined by six."[3] He meant, of course, Cochrane's squadron, and it

[1] To Marsden, April 14th: Nicolas, vi. p. 439.

[2] Phillimore, *Life of Sir William Parker*, ii. 289.

[3] Clarke and McArthur, ii. 427 (4th edition). For the reasons for assigning the St. Vincent Memorandum to 1803, see Laughton, *Nelson's Letters and Despatches* and *Fighting Instructions* (*Navy Records Society*), 280–1. The fact that it was found amongst Lord St. Vincent's papers raises in itself a strong presumption that it was written while he was still First Lord, that is, before May 1804. In 1805 he was playing Achilles in his tent, and Nelson was not in correspondence with him.

was certainly the general expectation in the fleet that these six vessels would be united to Nelson's flag when he reached the West Indies.[1] The loss of the memorandum of May 15th is greatly to be deplored; for few documents in Naval History could be of higher interest than one which contained Nelson's ideas of this time, on dealing with a superior enemy.

In order to ensure the co-operation of Cochrane's squadron, he had sent forward a frigate from Cape St. Vincent, but he was destined to be disappointed, owing to the difficult situation of affairs in the West Indies. Cochrane, in his pursuit of Missiessy, had reached Barbadoes on April 5th, little more than a month before Nelson had left the Straits. There he heard his enemy had just been reported in the neighbourhood of St. Domingo. In these circumstances his own inclination and the tenor of his instructions bade him continue his chase, if only for the safety of Jamaica. He scarcely waited to take over the formal command of the station from Commodore Hood: he did not even anchor, but leaving Hood in local command with one of his own ships, the *Spartiate*, to assist him in holding the station and supporting the local cruiser squadron, he held away with the rest—six in number—in hot pursuit and high hope of an encounter.

On April 9th he reached St. Thomas in the Virgins, where he ascertained Missiessy had already been to St. Domingo and landed his troops. He also received information that the French were expecting a second expedition, and that the combined force was to attack Jamaica. It was information too probable to ignore, and, little dreaming Missiessy was already well on his way back to Rochefort, he made up his mind he would be on the point of returning to Martinique to join the new-comers from France for the grand attack. Here, then, was a fine chance of nipping the combination in the bud by intercepting Missiessy on

[1] Allen, *Memoirs of Sir William Hargood*, p. 111.

his way. Doubling back, therefore, he passed along the south side of Puerto Rico and turned up into the Mona passage, between that island and St. Domingo. There he took station expecting every hour to see his adversary fall into his mouth. When, however, he did not appear, and all the information Cochrane could get pointed with increasing cogency to Jamaica as the point of danger, he felt there was nothing to do but to act on the instructions he had received from the Admiralty. They directed that if on his arrival he heard the Rochefort squadron had gone to St. Domingo, he was to reinforce the Jamaica station with six of the line. To Jamaica, therefore, he decided to sail with the whole squadron.[1] It was a resolution that demanded no little loyalty and self-sacrifice. For it meant depriving himself of almost the whole of his squadron. He had no intention of remaining there himself. His place was on the Leeward Islands station. Indeed he only stayed the few days necessary to hand over to Dacres five of his six vessels, for Dacres had nothing else of the line, and then on April 25th, keeping only his own flagship the *Northumberland* 80, he began the laborious task of working his way back to Barbadoes.

Such was the situation when on May 14th the Combined Squadron appeared at Martinique. Villeneuve was immediately assailed by the military authorities to attempt something against the British islands. But there were difficulties in the way. The orders with which he had sailed strictly enjoined he should go to Fort Royal and hold himself in readiness to join Ganteaume the very hour he should appear. How then could he entangle his fleet in combined operations? And apart from this difficulty he had still to face the menace of an unlocated enemy. A powerful squadron had been reported about St. Domingo and Puerto Rico. It was of course Cochrane's, but at Martinique they

[1] Cochrane to the Admiralty: *In-letters*, 326. April 5, 8, 9, 14, 17.

knew not what, nor where, nor how strong it was. Was it a squadron from England in chase of him, under the impression his objective was Jamaica? That was Villeneuve's first thought—it was impossible for him to tell. Meanwhile what could he attack with safety? Dominica and St. Lucia were the only islands within his reach, but he knew both were on their guard, and the recent example of Dominica showed they could not be reduced by a *coup de main*. Still, not being able to bring himself to spend the whole of his forty days waiting in inaction, he decided to send three frigates to cruise against the enemy's commerce, and endeavour to glean intelligence both from local craft and vessels arriving from Europe.

This done, he turned his attention to removing the disgrace of the Diamond Rock where Captain Maurice and his crew were still defiantly installed and active. Their last exploit—a favourite diversion—had been to entice one of Villeneuve's belated Spanish consorts close in to the rock by hoisting French colours and to salute her with a dose of their twenty-four pounders. It was beyond all endurance, and the day after the frigates left, Villeneuve sent against the rocky "sloop" a detachment of two of the line, three cruisers, and a dozen gunboats with a force of troops, under Captain Cosmao of the *Pluton* 74. It was not till the 31st that they were able to reach the landing-place. Seeing the overwhelming force opposed to him, Maurice abandoned the shore battery, and retired all his "crew" to his fastness aloft. The French at once effected a landing, but soon found themselves in a scrape. Maurice's position was absolutely inaccessible without scaling-ladders; the troops, who had been sea-sick for two days, were starving; and so heavy was the shower of stones and musketry that the defenders poured down that neither food nor water could be fetched from the squadron. Even the boat-guards could not remain at their post. Many were killed and

wounded, and all had to take shelter in caves below the fastness. They were themselves, as it were, besieged, and had to watch three gunboats get adrift and break up on the rocks. Day after day the ships bombarded the garrison, but till scaling-ladders arrived nothing could be done. A party of five-and-twenty men tried with ropes, but they were all taken prisoners.

Maurice's gallant resistance was not without result. The day the attack opened there arrived at Martinique the *Didon*, which it will be remembered had sailed two days after Magon, charged with Napoleon's new orders of April 29th and a copy of the previous orders which Magon was bringing. Her news was that Ganteaume, though hourly expected to sail, was still in Brest, but that, as Nelson had gone to Egypt, Villeneuve himself was not likely to be molested. Villeneuve also learnt that Magon had sailed from Rochefort with two of the line and 800 more troops to swell his force, and enable him "to continue his attacks on the British colonies." This was the order which directed him to employ his energies in this way for thirty-five days after Magon arrived, and if at the expiration of that period Ganteaume had not appeared, he was to return to Ferrol, and not to the Canaries as was provided by his original orders. With twenty of the line and 12,000 men, which with the local forces and his own he would have at his disposal, Napoleon, as we have seen, thought it possible he might be able to expel the British entirely from the Leeward Islands and even from Trinidad. The orders, however, concluded with a proviso that these enterprises were to be kept "subordinate to the grand object of the essential operation which was to crown his Majesty's arms."

Villeneuve was aghast. The new orders assumed he had been engaged already in attacking the British islands. Apparently Napoleon had forgotten what orders he had

given him. So far from having been told to operate against the British colonies, he had been strictly enjoined to do nothing but hold himself in readiness to sail with Ganteaume the moment he appeared. If only, he said in his reply, he had been told before he might have done something. But now it was too late. The English had been warned of his coming by the frigate which he knew Orde had sent out, and they were now on their guard everywhere. He had even been three days trying to take a paltry rock. Fifteen of his original forty days were already expired, and as for waiting thirty-five days after Magon's arrival, it was out of the question. His stores would not permit it. "Still," he wrote to his exasperating master, "as I see you condemn in advance the inaction to which my orders alone chained me . . . I will only say it has been to me insupportable. Be that as it may, as soon as the Diamond Rock is finished, we will start to attack Antigua or Barbuda."[1]

All this time the siege of the "sloop" had been proceeding, and it was not till June 3rd that any impression had been made. On that day the French, having procured the necessary scaling material, had succeeded in getting up the back of the Rock. Maurice saw himself faced with an assault, and by this time he had not a cartridge nor a drop of water left. He decided accordingly that further resistance was useless, and putting out a flag of truce, was allowed to march out of his fastness with the honours of war. The

[1] Desbrière, iv. 539–5. Confusion has arisen by Villeneuve's being supposed to have written "Barbade" instead of "Barboude," as though he meant to attack Barbadoes, which was in the opposite direction and far to windward. It is clear from his later despatch that by "Barbade" he meant the island adjacent to Antigua. See *post*, p. 165. With the experience of the Diamond Rock before him he could not have hoped to beat to Barbadoes and do anything there in less than a month, and his stores permitted of no such delay. "If," wrote Nelson afterwards, "Barbadoes is the object . . . a fleet could get there on the average in four or five days from Martinique. Therefore why should they make a passage of at least fifteen or sixteen days by going to the northward."—Nicolas, vi. 458. Spanish prisoners taken in Calder's action said the objective was Antigua.—*Blockade of Brest*, ii. 323.

number of his effective men the French returns put at 107, and he had only lost two killed and one wounded. The French put their landing force at 260, but Maurice believed they had 1500 ashore from first to last, and that they lost thirty killed and forty wounded. They themselves acknowledge a loss of at least fifty. In any case it was a gallant and useful defence, and when Maurice was court-martialled for the loss of "His Majesty's late sloop Diamond Rock" he was honourably acquitted with a high expression of admiration.[1]

The day after the surrender the French detachment rejoined the flag, and as they did so Magon appeared. Villeneuve, resolved not to lose another hour, made immediate preparations to proceed northward against Antigua and Barbuda. And well it was he did so, for even as Magon joined him the batteries of Barbadoes were saluting the Mediterranean squadron.

Nelson had gained ten days on his chase, and believed he had gained more. He was on fire to be gone. The six of the line he had expected were not there, but Cochrane was. He had arrived only two days before, after his weary beat back from Jamaica, and the same evening he was joined by Laforey in the *Spartiate*, who since the receipt of Orde's warning and the Admiralty orders to cover Eyre Coote's arrival, had been cruising to windward on the look-out for the transports and convoys from home. Nelson therefore had now twelve of the line, and the enemy, so he believed, had only eighteen, a supposition which the local information confirmed. Disappointing as it was, a superiority of a third in no way restrained his ardour. His only doubt was where to find them.

[1] For this interesting episode see *Life of Sir William Parker*, i. 294, who says Maurice had only 90 men, and that the French lost 800! Desbrière, iv. 541, gives Villeneuve's and Reille's accounts. The *Naval Chronicle*, xv. 123, gives Maurice's reports to both Nelson and Cochrane, and the French commander's report to Villaret-Joyeuse, Captain-General of Martinique, with other official documents and comments of the local press. The original of Maurice's report to Nelson is in *Admiralty In-letters*, 411, June 6th.

Now it so happened that the day before word had come in from General Brereton, the Commander-in-chief at St. Lucia, that the enemy had been reported to him as having been seen passing Gros Islet bay at the north-west of the island on the night of the 28th, and his belief was that the movement indicated an attack on Barbadoes or Trinidad. A possible explanation of this unfortunate piece of intelligence is that at the Gros Islet signal station they had seen the cruiser squadron which Villeneuve detached that day, and in the dark the anxious watchers had taken it for a fleet. General Myers, commanding at Carlisle Bay, had, however, no suspicion of its inaccuracy, and immediately sent it off to Nelson by his military secretary. As the enemy had not appeared at Barbadoes it could only be assumed they had gone to Trinidad, and by this time they would have landed their army. Myers, therefore, suggested that he should be permitted to accompany the fleet with 2000 men that he had available. It would mean a day's delay, but Nelson felt he could not say no. "I cannot refuse so handsome an offer," he wrote, "and with the blessing of God on a just cause I see no cause to doubt the annihilation of both the enemy's fleet and army."

He himself had expected to find the Combined Squadron to the northward, but the intelligence was precise, and he felt himself bound by it.[1] Brereton he had known well in the old Mediterranean days as an energetic and capable staff-officer in the Corsica operations, and felt he was a man to be trusted. On the morrow, therefore, with Myers and his troops hastily embarked, he sailed for Trinidad in high hopes of a decision.

In the interval of waiting he had issued a new order of

[1] A copy of the intelligence General Brereton had sent from St. Lucia was given to Nelson, and at the foot of it he wrote in his own hand, "Wrote by Major Myers, Sir William Myers' secretary, extracted from the General's letter, and Major Myers has no doubt the intelligence may be relied on" (Signed) Nelson and Bronté, June 4th: *Adm. Sec. In-letters*, 411, and Nicolas, vi. 446.

battle—to include Cochrane's two ships—which is of considerable interest, for in it we can detect a foreshadowing of the order he used at Trafalgar, at least in two important points. In the first place, like the order of the famous memorandum, it was an "Order of Battle and of Sailing" in two divisions, modified from the one he had issued at the Gulf of Palmas in March. In the second place, it shows his heaviest ships not distributed in the usual manner, but massed at the head of his own division after the fashion which Rodney first introduced into the Signal Book from Bigot de Morogues, and which Nelson was the first to employ on the day of reckoning. No accompanying tactical memorandum is known to exist, nor is there any express intimation that he intended to fight in two separate lines, though the actual disposition of the ships was similar to the one used at Trafalgar and would have lent itself to that form of engaging.[1]

In this order, early on the 6th, he made for Tobago, which lay in the direct course to Trinidad. Captain Bettesworth in the *Curieux* brig, one of the station cruisers, had been sent ahead for intelligence. On the morrow off the island he met Nelson with an important report. The previous day an American had informed the Tobago authorities that he had been boarded off St. Vincent by one of the ships of the French fleet, and that it had proceeded south. This information was of course false, and probably intended to mislead, but unfortunately it was confirmed shortly afterwards by the sight of a private schooner making the agreed signal for the enemy's fleet at Trinidad. Surely never had Admiral worse luck than Nelson on this occasion. It was not intended as a signal to the fleet. It was the private arrangement of an enterprising Tobago merchant, who, anxious to know what the fleet was, had

[1] This order of battle was printed in Hubback's *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*, p. 138, from Louis's copy, but with some obvious inaccuracies. The following is from Keats's copy, preserved in the Record Office, *Greenwich*

sent out his clerk to reconnoitre, and the signal he had

Hospital Miscellanea (*Various*), No. 141. It was drawn up apparently on an official form which provided for a fleet of thirty sail.

ORDER OF SAILING AND OF BATTLE.

Van Squadron.	1. *Canopus* 80 (Rear-Adm. Louis).	Starboard Division.
	2. ,,	
	3. ,,	
	4. *Superb* 74.	
	5. ,,	
	6. *Victory* 100 (Nelson).	
	7. *Donegal* 74.	
	8. ,,	
	9. *Spencer* 74.	
	10. ,,	
Centre Squadron.	1. ,,	
	2. ,,	
	3. *Tigre* 74.	
	4. ,,	
	5. *Northumberland* 80 (Cochrane).	Larboard Division.
	6. ,,	
	7. *Leviathan* 74.	
	8. ,,	
	9. ,,	
	10. ,,	
Rear Squadron.	1. ,,	
	2. ,,	
	3. ,,	
	4. ,,	
	5. ,,	
	6. *Belleisle* 74.	
	7. *Conqueror* 74.	
	8. *Swiftsure* 74.	
	9. *Spartiate* 74.	
	10. ,,	

The *Superb* was a very powerful ship of a new type which was copied from the *Pompée*, captured at Toulon. With her carronades she threw a broadside of 1000 lbs. The *Canopus* (a prize taken in 1798) had a broadside of 1092 lbs. The *Victory's* original armament (*i.e.* without carronades) gave a broadside of 1068 lbs. The *Donegal* was also a French prize of 1798, even larger than the *Superb*. After her re-armament with carronades she was sometimes classed as an 80-gun ship. The *Tigre*, which brought up the rear of Nelson's division, was also a heavy French prize captured in 1798, and equal in force to the *Superb*, as were also *Belleisle* and *Spartiate*. The rest were small 74's. The unequal distribution of ships in the squadrons shows that the divisional and not the squadronal organisation was to be used. In actual sailing Nelson did not occupy his station, but, as the practice was, led the starboard line. Under June 5th he enters in his Journal, "Directed *Canopus* to take her station astern of the *Victory* and the *Northumberland* to lead the lee line agreeable to the order of battle and sailing issued to the Fleet." With our knowledge of what happened at Trafalgar it may well be doubted whether Nelson would ever have got back into his place if the enemy had been met with.

arranged for reporting a British fleet happened to be the same Cochrane had established for the enemy at Trinidad—a serious lesson as to the dangers of amateur signalling in time of war. Its effect was of course to remove all Nelson's doubts. Signalling to prepare for action, he immediately hurried on. As he came in sight of Trinidad he was mistaken by the British military posts along the shore for the enemy, and according to rule they retired to concentrate on their main position, firing the blockhouses behind them. The flames in the dim morning light gave the final touch of certainty. The enemy had obviously landed, and Nelson pushed on through the Dragon's Mouth right into the Gulf of Paria, assured he had before him at Port of Spain another battle of the Nile.

As they opened the harbour and not a sign of an enemy was to be seen, they could scarcely believe their eyes, so certain and doubly corroborated had been the intelligence. What Nelson felt not a single letter reveals. His self-restraint is admirable; the best of him came out; he simply cast all intelligence to the winds and immediately turned back, resolved to act on his own judgment.

Early next morning, the 8th, as he was repassing the Dragon's Mouth, he was met with a despatch from Captain Maurice telling him that Diamond Rock had fallen and that the Combined Squadron had not yet left Martinique. There was hope still. Maurice also informed him that he had been assured by his captors that the Ferrol squadron had recently joined. This Nelson was sure could not be true, for had it come Maurice himself must have seen it. "I have my doubts," he wrote to the Governor of Barbadoes, "respecting the certainty of the arrival of the Ferrol squadron . . . but, my lord, powerful as their force may be they shall not with impunity make any great attacks. Mine is compact; theirs must be unwieldy; and although a

very pretty fiddle, I don't believe that either Gravina or Villeneuve know how to play upon it."[1]

No one knew better than he the deterrent power of a fleet actively in being; and away he held northward, intent to prove the truth of his theory. Next day he was off Grenada. Maurice's news that the enemy had not yet moved was confirmed, but shortly afterwards he was met by a cruiser from Dominica bringing word that on the evening of the 6th, three days before, the whole Combined Fleet had been sighted off the south end of Guadaloupe steering north. "Whether the enemy's object is to attack Antigua or St. Kitts," he wrote to the Admiralty, "or to return to Europe time will show," and under a press of sail he carried on, giving successive rendezvous at Montserrat and Antigua.

This time the information was true. It was early on the morning of June 5th, as Nelson was steering to the southward for Trinidad, that Villeneuve had moved north, "with the intention," as he wrote in his official report, "of making an attack on the Island of Barbuda."[2] Passing along the lee side of Dominica the French saw a British convoy and its escort under the guns of a protected anchorage, but they left it alone. Villeneuve was bent on reaching Guadaloupe to pick up another battalion, and this done he held on his way. The same night—that is, the 6th—when Nelson was nearing Tobago—he was steering to pass between Antigua and Montserrat.[3] "At ten o'clock in the morning," he proceeds, "after having doubled Antigua, we had word in the north-north-west of a convoy of fourteen

[1] To Lord Seaforth, June 8th.

[2] Desbrière, iv. 679. Colonel Desbrière again reads the word "Barbade." But his text shows the letter has been incorrectly transcribed in other places, and it is certain that Villeneuve wrote or meant to write "Barbude" or "Barboude." See notes below.

[3] The transcript which Colonel Desbrière used reads "*débarquer entre Antigoa et Mont-Serrat*," but he has kindly informed me that the word should certainly be "*débouquer*," Anglice "disembogue." This course would not lead anywhere but to Barbuda.

sail under escort of a single schooner. I ordered a general chase, and by nightfall the whole convoy was taken except the escort ship."[1]

With the exception of the reduction of Diamond Rock, this capture was the only positive result of the operations from which Napoleon hoped so much. It was a convoy homeward-bound, which had assembled in the usual way at St. John's Road, Antigua, to await the coming of the other divisions from the southward with the regular escort. But the merchants, on hearing that the Rochefort ships had joined Villeneuve and that the Combined Fleet with 10,000 men was about to attack the island, had fallen into so unfortunate an alarm that they had memorialised the governor to demand immediate convoy from the local cruisers. On the governor's representations Captain Nourse, the senior officer at St. John's, had ordered Lieutenant-Commander William Carr of the *Netley* schooner to take them home.[2] The reward of their panic was to fling their ships into Villeneuve's lap. Carr, of course, could do nothing. The moment he sighted the advanced frigates of the enemy he signalled his merchantmen to make away and save themselves, while he kept the *Netley* lying-by to watch the enemy till they were within gunshot. Then as he ran, chased by two frigates, he had to watch the French fleet spread to pick up his dispersing convoy. By sunset, when he succeeded in dropping his pursuers, he had seen the whole of it captured.

He was now in as difficult a position as a young officer could well have to face. He had nothing left to escort home, but he had despatches for the Admiralty from Captain Nourse, his senior officer. On the other hand, he had located the enemy and knew their approximate force.

[1] Desbrière, iv. 680. The *Journal de Reille*, as Colonel Desbrière's transcript reads it, has "*à 10 heures du matin, étant sous le vent de Barbade, les vigies ont signalé un convoi de quinze voiles.*" Here "Barbade" must clearly mean "Barbuda."

[2] Captain Nourse of the *Barbadoes* to the Admiralty (*In-letters*, 2231), enclosing the merchants' memorial and the governor's request.

What ought he to do? Should he carry on home with his despatches or return and report to the Admiral the vital information upon which he had stumbled. In his dilemma he took the extreme step of opening the despatches. He found in them nothing but Nourse's explanation of why he had ordered the *Netley* home. All doubt was then removed as to the direction in which his duty lay, and he promptly decided to return to find Nelson.[1]

At the same time Villeneuve had obtained equally important information. From his prisoners he learned that the British Mediterranean fleet had arrived at Barbadoes twelve or fourteen strong. It was what he had dreaded all along, and he had no more spirit in him. "This force," he wrote, "joined to that of Admiral Cochrane, which is about in these seas, would be enough to balance the combined forces, even if it were not superior, seeing the strength of the ships, of which several are three-deckers." In his eyes it made every enterprise against the enemy's possessions impossible. The utmost he could do would be to go back to Martinique and await the time fixed for his return to Europe, "in painful inaction," as he said, "disastrous to the health of his crews." Even that would take ten days and might expose him to a battle, and where could he refit afterwards? Even a victory, which he clearly did not expect, would render his return to Europe impossible. The truth was he found himself brought up against one of the vital defects of Napoleon's ill-considered plan. There it was inevitably staring Villeneuve in the face, and in his distress he consulted Gravina. The condition of the Spanish crews permitted of but one answer. Ganteaume or

[1] Carr to Nelson, June 13th, enclosed in Nelson to Marsden, June 14th: *In-letters*, 411. See below p. 169 *n*. James gives the name of the *Netley*'s commander as Richard Harward and says Nourse was with him. There seems no authority for either statement.—Vol. iv. p. 351. For Carr's previous exploits see *Ibid.*, pp. 248–9. He was still in command of the *Netley* in 1807 when she was captured by a French frigate and brig.—*Ibid.*, v. 466.

no Ganteaume, they must lose not a moment in returning to Europe. Hastily the prizes were committed to a frigate, the local troops crowded into four other cruisers to be returned to their garrisons, and on June 10th they held away with all speed for the Azores.

Was ever the weakness of surprise command more strongly exhibited? Was ever clearer proof of how the apprehension of counter-surprise by an active and unlocated force always neutralises its apparent possibilities? "We have been masters of the sea for three weeks," wrote one of Villeneuve's most observant officers, "with a landing force of 7000 to 8000 men and have not been able to attack a single island."[1] Yet Napoleon could still dream of conquering the world by a few hours' command of the Channel.

The decision to which the vice of the Emperor's scheme drove the two entangled Admirals was none too prompt. On the 10th, as they were transhipping the troops, Nelson was signalling Montserrat for his rendezvous. Next day he sent in there for intelligence, but they could give him none of any use—nothing indeed but a report from an American skipper that the Combined Fleet had left Guadaloupe with the intention, as it was supposed, of attacking Antigua. To Antigua therefore he pushed, but only to find, as he approached the island, no sign of the enemy. He was now faced with the necessity of making a decision at least as great and really more difficult than that he had come to off Cape St. Vincent a month before. On the morning of the 12th, as he waited for his cruiser to bring news from the shore, he was again in the same uncertainty as that which had tormented him at Gibraltar. From "under Antigua" he wrote to the Admiralty: "If I hear nothing of the enemy at Antigua I shall stand for Prince Rupert's Bay [that is, back to Dominica] and form my judgment;

[1] *Journal de Reille:* Desbrière, iv. 681.

but, I feel, having saved these colonies and two hundred and upwards of sugar-loaded ships, that I must be satisfied they have bent their course for Europe before I push after them." Here was the same inspiration divining his enemy's intention and the same restrained determination not to act on inspiration alone. The ink was not dry before the information he awaited was obtained. Word came in that the French troops which had been taken from Guadaloupe had come back and disembarked. Then he was practically sure. "Therefore," he wrote, "I am pushing for the anchorage of St. John's [Antigua] to land the troops and hope to sail in the morning after them for the Straits' mouth."

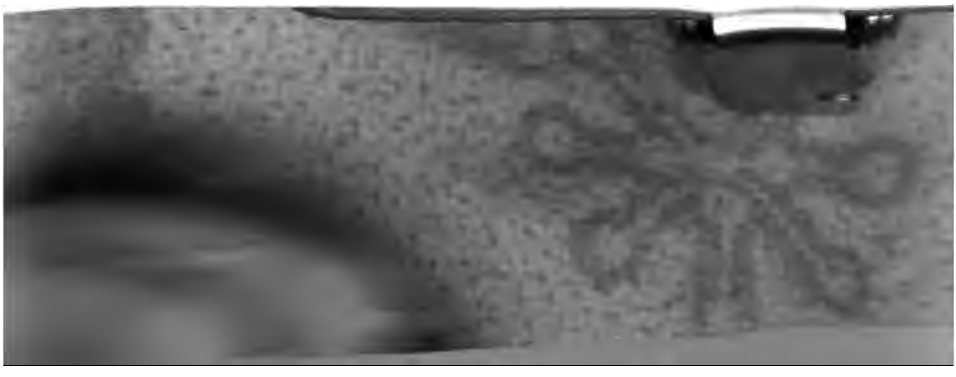
Thus before he had Carr's intelligence he had practically made up his mind, and Bettesworth, in the *Curieux*, was sent off with his despatches to inform the Admiralty that Villeneuve was on his way back and that he was after him. In the evening he anchored at St. John's and proceeded to disembark his troops. By morn on the morrow they were all ashore, and the fleet got under way. Scarcely had it done so when the *Netley* came in to remove all doubt from his mind and report the enemy far stronger than he had thought. Before dark she had counted no less than thirty-two sail.[1] Carr's report of the enemy's force in no way altered Nelson's intention to get at them if he could. It rather raised his hopes. Instead of thirty days, he was now only four or five behind Villeneuve, and there was every prospect of a meeting. True, he thought it probable

[1] Letter from an officer on board one of Lord Nelson's ships: *Add. MSS.* 3430, June 19th; Nelson to Marsden, June 14th: *In-letters*, 411. Nicolas missed this letter and it seems never to have been printed. It runs; "*Victory* at sea, June 14th. The *Netley* schooner joined me yesterday morning about an hour after the fleet got under weigh (*sic*) from St. John's Road, Antigua, when Lieutenant Carr came on board and showed me the accompanying despatches from Captain Nourse of the *Barbadoes*, addressed to you (which in his hurry to return to the *Netley* he omitted to take with him). I therefore judge it proper to forward them to you in the state they were left, and also beg leave to transmit you for their Lordships' information a letter from Lieutenant Carr giving his reasons for having opened the said despatches." The letter was not holograph, but signed by Nelson.

the Spaniards would be detached to Havana, but the possibility of their remaining with Villeneuve was faced and did nothing to check the chase. He would not even retain Cochrane, who was ordered to return to his station. Nelson was content to keep the *Spartiate*, and so had eleven of the line with his flag.

With this slender force he was ready to fight, but in certain conditions only. As before, when he believed his strategy had forced Villeneuve from the Mediterranean, his object was partly gained already. He had forced the enemy from the West Indies, and he could now weigh risks more calmly. "Do not imagine," he is reported to have said to his assembled captains, "that I am one of those hot-brained people who fight at immense disadvantage without an adequate object. My object is partly gained. If we meet them we shall find them not less than eighteen, I rather think, twenty sail of the line, and therefore do not be surprised if I should not fall upon them immediately. We won't part without a battle. I think they will be glad to let me alone, if I will let them alone, which I will do till we approach the shores of Europe or they give me an advantage too tempting to be resisted."[1]

[1] The authority for these observations is not known. Clarke and McArthur give it as the purport of his remarks (without mentioning their source of information) on one of the occasions when during the chase he assembled his captains on board the *Victory*. There is another traditional story on the point which has never been published. It was related by Elliot, afterwards Governor of St. Helena, to Lieutenant A. H. Hoskins, R.N., afterwards Admiral Sir Anthony Hoskins. He repeated it to his flag-lieutenant, now Captain Mark Kerr who has kindly given it to me as he wrote it down at the time, as follows: "On the way back from the West Indies Nelson was walking up and down the quarter-deck talking to the officer of the watch, who said, 'I wish we could fall in with Villeneuve, sir.' Nelson: 'Yes, it would be very satisfactory to know where he is.' The officer: 'What a glorious fight we should have, sir!' Nelson: 'I don't think I should fight him.' Officer: 'Not fight him! Why all the way out you were dying to get at him.' Nelson: 'All the way out he was getting stronger and I was getting weaker. All the way home I am getting stronger and he is getting weaker. If we fell in with him now and fought him, I don't doubt we should beat him, and it would be a great thing for my personal glory; but I should be doing my country a great wrong. I know that in a week's time I shall get reinforcements, and



With these ideas in his mind he disappeared once more into the Atlantic, leaving Cochrane in no easy frame of mind. So skilfully had the French directed attention to Jamaica that he could not share Nelson's view. It will have been noticed that throughout all these operations the reinforced squadron at Jamaica had made no move. They had been waiting on the defensive at Port Royal ready to do their best against the expected attack till reinforcements arrived. So far, it may be said, they had been enticed away, but in fact they were not off the board. As we have seen, it was their presence in the West Indian seas that convinced Villeneuve he could do nothing. But for Cochrane the menace still existed. Ten days after Nelson had left, he was back at Barbadoes writing anxiously to the Admiralty that he was sure Jamaica was the objective. He did not know, curiously enough, where Nelson had gone, but from what he had said in conversation, Cochrane was afraid he thought Villeneuve had gone back to the Mediterranean.[1] He was naturally anxious. He was alone on the station, for Hood had gone home with a convoy. It was not till three weeks later that the *Ramilies* and *Illustrious*, which Collingwood had sent to reinforce Nelson, appeared in Carlisle Bay, to relieve his mind. Yet no sooner had they arrived than he received a report of the Combined Fleet having been seen steering a course which pointed to its intended junction with the Brest and Ferrol squadrons. If Nelson, as he believed, had gone to the Straits, the crisis would be acute. In a moment all thought of his own comfort was cast aside. With the usual insight into the mind of the Admiralty he decided

he will get none, and then I must annihilate him.'" The moral of the story is obvious, but as it stands it is in some details difficult to understand. By Villeneuve's growing stronger on the outward voyage, he presumably referred to his fleet shaking down by being at sea; but Nelson's growing weaker is curious, since we had a squadron in the West Indies and the allies had nothing.

[1] *In-letters*, 326, June 25th.

to send both the ships back at once with two convoys that were due to sail. "Every line of battle ship that can be spared," he wrote to the Admiralty, "from hence may be wanted in the Channel," and almost as he penned the words an identical order was being drawn up at the Admiralty.[1]

It was a belief of the old Spaniards that Drake had a magic mirror in which he could see all the movements of his enemies and count their numbers. In a sense it was true, and in that sense he had handed it on to his successors. That mirror was the tradition he had founded, and they had polished it by rich experience till it became a living instinct for naval war to which every man could turn for guidance. Cochrane, one of the least of Drake's heirs, could see in it plainly the stress and strain that was prevailing in home waters, and it told him the crisis of the campaign had come, as indeed it had.

[1] *In-letters*, 326, July 13th and 17th; *Admiralty Minutes*, 154. The minute enjoining the return of the two ships with any convoys that were ready is dated July 11th, that is, in the same week that Cochrane decided to return them on his own responsibility.

CHAPTER XII

HOW LORD BARHAM MET THE CRISIS

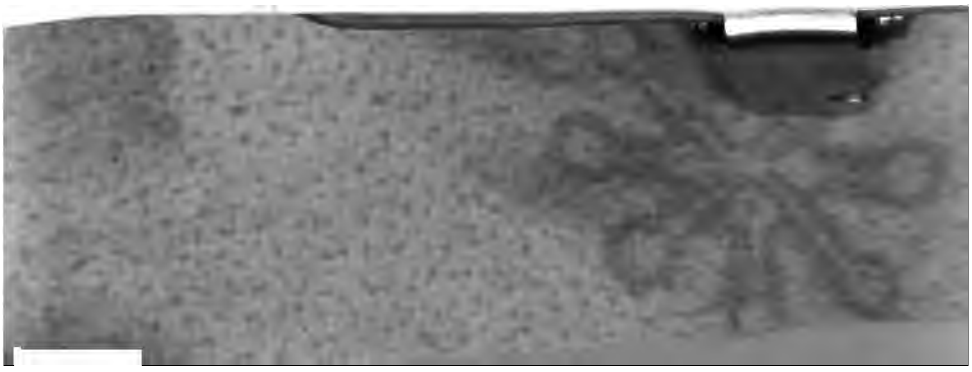
TOWARDS the end of May Cornwallis had reported himself fit for duty, but owing to the dislocation caused by Villeneuve's escape and Missiessy's return the Admiralty decided it was better to postpone making any change in the main command. By the end of June, however, when the situation had been restored, he received orders to relieve Lord Gardner, who was to return to his old post at Cork and resume the management of the cruisers on the Irish station.

The centre of disturbance had passed away westward. No one as yet could tell it was moving back again, and in the home area there was calm. As the hour approached for which Napoleon had worked so long and elaborately, he was more than ever bent on lulling his enemy into security, or at least diverting British attention from his focal point, He was still in Italy employing the last days of his sojourn in developing the military and naval resources of his new kingdom, and in particular at Genoa, whose ancient status he intended to revive with a naval yard and arsenal. His continued absence so far from Boulogne would serve well, he believed, to deepen the impression he wished to create, and seeing what was in his mind he could not approve of Ganteaume's desire to make continual sorties. Such demonstrations could only serve to keep the enemy on the alert. He even doubted the wisdom of keeping the whole fleet out in the Bertheaume anchorage and wished to have

some of the ships sent back into port. "My intention," he wrote to Decrès, "would be to lull the English to sleep as much as possible about the Brest squadron, in a natural manner, however (*sans affectation*), and direct all their attention on the Texel. Write in this sense to Marmont. . . . . I myself will cause a picket of my guard to march on Utrecht, and on my arrival in Paris, I shall announce my departure for that place. That will make them afraid that Villeneuve is going there and will induce them to weaken before Brest, which is the great point." He assured Decrès the trick would serve. "There's nothing," he said, "so short-sighted as the English Government. It is a government absorbed in party politics (*chicanes intérieures*), which turns its attention wherever there is a noise."[1]

It was an error not confined to Napoleon or to his age—to assume that the energy and spirit with which British politicians play the Parliamentary game denote incapacity for war and real statesmanship, or at least neglect and blindness in large imperial issues. Still it is difficult to believe that so great a soldier, who was not wont to underrate his enemies, could really have expected by means so trivial to gull the old hands against whom he was playing into breaking their hold on the long-tried position. Yet he himself sent Marmont elaborate orders on the subject. "The English," he wrote, "have at Yarmouth no more than three vessels of a higher rate than sixty-fours. I want to draw more to that point to further my operations." Marmont himself is to keep away from the Texel, but in the second week of July he is to embark a division, move the squadron as far out in the roads as safety will permit, and arrange a *mise en scène* which will suggest a distant expedition. Then on July 20th he is suddenly to put all his army in motion, get it afloat in the course of the week and embark in person with pilots

[1] From Bologna, June 22nd: *Correspondance*, x. 556.



for the voyage to Ireland north-about. The Dutch Admiral and his officers are not to be told the real meaning of the movement. "It will look," he says, "as if you were only waiting for a gale to drive off the English blockading squadron and let you out, which will necessarily compel the English to keep there a squadron of at least ten of the line and give them all kinds of uneasiness." Finally, in view probably of one of the many strokes he was contemplating for the Rochefort squadron, Marmont was warned not to think his embarkation was a mere parade. It was quite possible it might become a real operation.[1]

The disturbing power of an army by the sea with transports and escort alongside—a specially English device—is often questioned. Here at least is evidence of Napoleon's faith in it—a faith, it must be said, that was not a little justified by the confusing effect which his garrisons in the Neapolitan ports had had upon Nelson's judgment; and in this case, as we shall see, it did have a certain effect.

Though the idea of combining the Rochefort squadron with Marmont's corps attracted Napoleon's imagination for a while, he never regarded it very seriously. What he really hoped to get out of the isolated squadron for the effect he wanted was a raid as far possibly as the mouth of the Baltic, which would threaten British commerce and a descent in Ireland. The main trouble was to find a commander fit to conduct so daring and hazardous an enterprise. With Missiessy Napoleon was disgusted, and particularly for the lack of energy and initiative he had displayed in the West Indies. "I choked with indignation," he told Decrès, "when I read he had not taken the Diamond;" and again, "That Rock will be an eternal monument of shame to this expedition." He had counted on the squadron being out again within a week of its arrival, but in place of the news he expected he received lamentations from the

[1] To Marmont and to Decrès, Parma, June 27th: *Correspondance*, x. 566-8.

old Admiral that he was ill, that he doubted if he was fit for sea again, and that he wanted to go to Paris to see his wife. Unable to think of any one to replace him, Napoleon after his manner fell to coaxing and trying to appeal to his ambition. Decrès was to tell him he was the link on which the great combination depended and that he could not go to Paris. "However," he wrote, "I think Madame Missiessy is a reasonable woman with a little ambition. Get her to go to Rochefort. It is only right that Admiral Missiessy should see his wife. Let her make him understand he must finish the campaign."[1] But all was useless, and Missiessy finally gave up the command on the ground of ill-health.

Napoleon's first idea was to replace him by Rallier, an old officer whose reputation rested on his cruiser work in years gone by under Suffren. But he was tired of old Admirals and resolved to inaugurate a change. "There is no good blinking the fact," he wrote to Decrès before Missiessy's final resignation, "henceforth I must choose my Admirals from young officers of thirty-two years of age, and I have enough cruiser captains with ten years' active service to select six to whom I may entrust commands. . . . Meanwhile make the Rochefort squadron sail with Missiessy or some one else."[2]

The man Decrès chose was Allemand, Captain of the *Magnanime*, one of Missiessy's ships of the line. He was reported to have shown high ability and spirit during the expedition and, as events were to prove, no selection could have been better. His influence was felt immediately. By the end of the month there was so much activity in the port that Graves was regretting the two of the line that had been removed from him on his first optimistic reports. The squadron was accordingly brought up again to five of

[1] To Decrès, Milan, June 6th: *Correspondance*, x. 482.
[2] June 14th: *Ibid.*, p. 563. Lacour-Gayet, *Louis XVI.*, p. 661.

the line and Graves himself was relieved by Admiral Stirling, in the *Glory* 98—an intrepid officer, who had been serving as Navy Commissioner at Jamaica and had just come home on promotion to fly his flag for the first time.

At Ferrol it was equally difficult to conceal the imminence of the crisis. Calder's intelligence system was perfect. An Englishman, who had been both British and American consul before the war, had remained on in the latter capacity and was furnishing the Admiral with regular information. Napoleon had just sent down orders that Gourdon and his Spanish colleague, Admiral de Grandallana, should move the thirteen of the line, which they now had complete for service, out to Coruña, so as to be ready to put to sea the moment Villeneuve and Gravina appeared. Before Gourdon could acknowledge the order and point out its impossibility owing to the lack of anchorage room at Coruña, it was in Calder's hands. The consul had sent it out to him by an English-American skipper who sailed on July 3rd. Calder had just been reinforced with the two seventy-fours which Graves had reported he could spare from before Rochefort, but he had had to send home his largest three-decker, the *Royal Sovereign*, to refit. This left him with but nine sail of the line, only two of which were three-deckers. He did not think such a squadron sufficient for the blockade, but assured his chief "that everything in his power should be done for his majesty's service with such a force as their lordships should deem adequate to the critical service he was employed upon."[1]

Further south Collingwood was also on the alert, keeping a close watch on Cadiz with three of his battle squadron, and holding the Straits with the fourth off Cape Spartel and a frigate at Gibraltar. Inside the Mediterranean Bickerton with his battle squadron was in a position off

[1] Gourdon to Beurnonville, July 7th: Desbrière, iv. 627. Calder to Gardner, July 5th, and Gardner to Marsden, July 6th: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 298–9.

Cartagena to cover the passage of Craig's expedition while his cruisers formed its escort and secured it against an attack from the Toulon frigates. These vessels as well as others in Genoa were also being watched by the cruiser squadron which Nelson had committed to Captain Capel, and he had been blockading one of them in Villefrance, the port of Nice. The disposition Capel had adopted was principally directed to preventing any expedition passing to Sardinia. The *Excellent* was still at Naples—a comfortable pledge of British policy and a symbol of the power that was at Elliot's back, and Bickerton, realising her political importance, had refrained from calling her to his flag. At Malta, Sir Alexander Ball had a fifty-gun ship and four or five cruisers for the protection of the Levant trade. There was also a frigate at Constantinople, which had gone thither with our Minister, and at Trieste was a brig for commerce protection. The military command of the Adriatic was further secured by a Russian squadron at Corfu, which by the end of July amounted to four of the line and ten cruisers.[1]

Such, then, was the actual naval situation at the end of June. It remains to consider how Napoleon appreciated it, and we have it all in an elaborate memorandum he prepared for Decrès. He saw eighteen of the line before Brest, six before Rochefort, eight before Ferrol, and not more than four in the Mediterranean. Of Nelson and Collingwood he knew nothing. The only information he had was a false report that they had met off Cape St. Vincent on May 15th, and had then disappeared. Possibly they had gone together to the West Indies, but he did not think this likely. He persuaded himself that while Nelson proceeded there alone to join Cochrane, Collingwood had been sent to the East Indies. If this were true, Nelson would lose several

[1] Knight to Nelson, July 16th, and same to Collingwood, August 5th: *Nelson Papers, Add. MSS.* 3430. Napoleon to Decrès, June 22, 25, 27: *Correspondance*, x. 555, 564, 568.

days at Barbadoes making his junction with Cochrane and filling up his ships, and in the interval Villeneuve, having heard of his arrival, would have time to get clear away. The only result, then, of Nelson's chase would be that Villeneuve would not wait his allotted time and the crisis would come a little sooner than was intended. He would meet the situation by making an earlier return to Boulogne. "I shall hasten my coming," he says, "by some days, because I think Nelson's arrival in America may push Villeneuve to leave for Ferrol."

Still he could not conceal from himself that Villeneuve might be caught and blockaded in Fort de France, and in his heart he doubted whether the great combination could ever come off. His memorandum concluded with yet another change of plan, in which ultimate reliance is placed on the Brest squadron alone. Two lines of operation on which it might act were submitted for Decrès' opinion. If Ganteaume saw a chance of getting out, should he shape his course as though he were going to attack Ireland, but instead of doing so, plunge into the Channel and come before Boulogne with his own squadron alone; or should he first go down and pick up the Ferrol squadron and enter the Channel with thirty-three of the line? "It is an involved game (*jeu mêlé*) no doubt," he wrote, as indeed it was, "but one that will always be something to fall back upon, if Villeneuve gets blockaded. . . . Write of it all the same to Ganteaume as a general theme to find out what he thinks."[1] What Ganteaume did think, as we shall see presently in his crushing reply, was that it ignored the fundamental consideration on which the British system of defence was securely based.

Two days after Napoleon had penned this final appreciation, the outlook of the British Admiralty was cleared at last by certain information that Villeneuve had been to

[1] To Decrès, June 28th: *Correspondance*, x. 573.

the West Indies. He had reached Martinique, it was said, on May 13th with sixteen of the line. The news was brought to Liverpool by a "running ship"—one of those adventurous merchantmen who preferred the enjoyment of a hungry market to the unprofitable security of a convoy. Sent up to Pitt by the Mayor, it was in his hands by July 1st. The same day he forwarded it to the Admiralty with an intimation that he had decided to reissue Sir Eyre Coote's orders for the West Indies. All this time the expedition had been waiting at Cork for instructions. Coote was now directed to embark his troops immediately and the Board was required to provide him with convoy.[1]

This resolution of the Cabinet by no means indicates that Napoleon had succeeded in diverting Barham's attention to the West Indies. It was merely a precaution; for the same day the news was received the Admiralty sent off to Collingwood and Calder a warning to be on their guard against Villeneuve's sudden return.[2] Barham, in the ripeness of his rich experience, evidently had as little doubt as Napoleon as to what would be the effect of Nelson's breaking in upon the Caribbean Sea. Indeed every British Admiral in European waters was expecting Villeneuve's reappearance somewhere. At this very time Collingwood was writing: "I think it not impossible I shall have all these fellows coming from the West Indies again before the hurricane months, unless they sail from there directly for Ireland, which I have always had an idea was their plan; for this Bonaparte has as many tricks as a monkey. I believe their object in the West Indies to be less conquest than to draw our forces from home. The Rochefort squadron seems to have had nothing else in view."[3] And these were the men that Napoleon thought he had deceived.

[1] *Admiralty In-letters* (*Sec. of State*), 4199, July 1st.
[2] *Admiralty Minutes*, 153, July 1st.
[3] To Dr. Carlyle, July 2nd: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 296.

The only uncertain point was the home port for which Villeneuve would make. Should it be Cadiz or any point in the Mediterranean there was cause for considerable anxiety. How weak was the position at the mouth of the Straits, Barham did not know till July 7th. On that day a despatch from Collingwood reached the Admiralty informing them that on second thoughts he had obeyed their order to send two of the line to Nelson.[1] As he had been told to divide his squadron with Bickerton, Barham correctly inferred from this that he would have only four of the line with his flag, and the old First Lord sat down in the solitude of his room to grapple with the situation. The result was one of those priceless strategical minutes in which the old British lore lies embalmed and almost forgotten.[2]

It begins with an exact statement of the actual disposition of the force available. "Now off Brest, 22; off Rochefort, 5; off Ferrol, including 2 from Rochefort, 12;" and two others immediately available, besides 5 in reserve to replace ships coming in to refit. This, he says, meant from 38 to 40 of the line "manned and stored," disposable for Brest, Rochefort, and Ferrol, that is, for the "Western Squadron." What he proposed was to detach immediately from Cornwallis ten of the line to reinforce Collingwood off Cadiz. "Because," he explains, "I take it for granted that only four remain there. That makes a strong force at the very spot where they may be expected." He was at one, therefore, with Nelson as to Villeneuve's most probable destination. To this extent Napoleon had led them both astray, but not for a moment did Barham neglect the alternative possibility that the Combined Squadron might return

[1] *In-letters*, 410, June 8th, endorsed "Approved, July 7th."

[2] *Barham Papers*, iii. 355. The document is dated "July," but as it is specially founded on the information of Collingwood's having detached his two of the line to Nelson, it must have been written on the 7th or 8th. On the 9th, as we shall see, it was cancelled on fresh information. The main lines of the plan which it embodies had been in Barham's mind for some time. See *post*, Appendix G, Note 1 "Nauticus," 516.

to a French port in the Bay. Indeed his minute is mainly devoted to providing for this eventuality. His plan for dealing with it is based on striking Villeneuve before he can get within distance of his destination whatever it might be, or in touch with any of the three blockaded squadrons in Brest, Rochefort, or Ferrol. It was obvious that one or more of the blockading squadrons must be used for the counter-stroke. The problem, therefore, was how to deliver the blow at a sufficient distance to seaward and at the same time prevent any of the blockaded squadrons from moving. The solution was worthy of his genius. He would use the Ferrol and Brest squadrons for his striking force, each on its own line, but in such a way as not to raise either blockade. "Let the Ferrol squadron," he wrote, "get three additional frigates and be ordered to stretch north-north-west of Ferrol by means of frigates and show themselves off Ferrol itself occasionally and at such undetermined periods as to disguise the real object of their cruise." As for Rochefort, it is to be kept strictly blockaded; but he adds, "Let the fleet off Brest, reduced for the moment to 12 sail, but reinforced by the *Defence*, *Goliath*, and *Zealous* to 15, be ordered to stretch out to the south-south-west in a direct line for Cape Finisterre, and by means of frigates keep up communication with the Ferrol squadron."

The plan was certainly daring, and particularly in his handling of the Brest squadron. At first sight it seems to entail a serious loosening of the defensive basis of the campaign. It appeared to involve, moreover, not only the possibility of opening the Channel, but also of the Ferrol squadron escaping to break the Rochefort blockade. Barham was not blind to this aspect of his disposition, but he calculated, and as it was to prove afterwards, calculated rightly, the risk had no real existence. "Before these plans," he argues, "were developed to the enemy the cause for their existence would have ceased; that is, the Com-

bined Fleet would have returned for Europe, or the uncertainty with regard to their motions would be at an end." At any rate the moral effect of success would be so great as to justify whatever risk was entailed. "The interception of the fleet in question," he concludes, "on its return to Europe would be a greater object than any I know. It would damp all future expeditions and would show to Europe that it might be advisable to relax in the blockading system occasionally for the express purpose of putting them in our hands at a convenient opportunity." In other words, the moral effect would be to relieve materially the almost unendurable strain of the great blockade; for whenever any part of it was temporarily relaxed the enemy would suspect a trap was being laid for him.

Such was the masterly plan with which Barham intended to meet the difficult and uncertain situation. Forty-eight hours proved the soundness of his calculations. Before the enemy could know what the new disposition meant, he rightly judged the fog would be cleared and it would not be wanted. Before his draft could even be reduced to the form of orders the light came. For at eleven o'clock at night on July 8th Captain Bettesworth of the *Curieux*, direct from Nelson, rattled up to the door of the Admiralty.

On the 7th, as Barham was quietly working out his plans, the *Curieux* was anchoring at Plymouth. She had made the passage from Antigua in twenty-four days. In hot haste Bettesworth had posted to London, but only to find, so the story goes, that Lord Barham had gone to bed and that no one dared to rouse him. At an early hour the old man awoke and fell into a fury when he knew what had been awaiting him. For it was not only Nelson's despatches Bettesworth had to deliver, but having taken a more northerly course than the Admiral, who was making for the Straits, he had sighted Villeneuve and determined his course. It was on June 19th, as high as latitude 33° 12′

and in longitude 58°—that is, some 900 miles north-n
east of Antigua—that he had seen him, and the Comb
Fleet was still standing to the northward. Till there c
be no doubt Bettesworth had shadowed them, and
made all sail home with his all-important news.
Villeneuve had stood so far to the northward could
mean he was making for the Bay, and not, as both Bar
and Nelson expected, for the Straits. What was to be d
In half-an-hour Barham had decided.

The historian James, who may have obtained infor
tion on the incident through the First Lord's secre
tells us that without waiting to dress and growling
seven or eight hours had been lost, he wrote out the n
sary orders and sent them off. The story has been doul
but it has certainly some foundation. Amongst his pa
there still exists a rapid minute which he dashed o
meet the situation. It is written at speed with sev
interlineations on a small scrap of paper in eloquent
trast to the long memorandum, which he had just c
pleted. Cadiz was no longer the centre of anxiety,
with extraordinary decision and directness for a ma
eighty years he recasts in half-a-dozen lines his prev
scheme. Calder was clearly in the most immediate da
and also in the best position for striking Villeneuve be
he could get a landfall. But to reinforce him from C
wallis, as he had intended, was not without danger.
Cornwallis might almost equally well fall the chance of
contact, and if he were weakened it was now doul
whether ships detached from him to Ferrol could be
placed from his reserve in time.

The problem was thorny, and it is clear that for a w
Barham was in two minds about it. As he first drafted
minute it ran: "My idea is to send the intelligence
mediately to Admiral Cornwallis, who may be directe
strengthen Sir Robert Calder's squadron with as m

ships as will make them up to 15." This was in accordance with the memorandum of the previous day, which provided that "Rochefort is to be kept strictly blockaded." But on second thoughts it must have occurred to him that the risk of weakening the Ushant position was too great —that in fact he was trying for something beyond the resources that were immediately available. The only sound solution was to concentrate on the two most vital points. For this the Rochefort blockade must be sacrificed, and Stirling be ordered to join Calder. Accordingly before completing the minute he amended it in this sense, and in its final form it ran as follows—the italicised passages being those which he inserted: "My idea is to send the intelligence immediately to Admiral Cornwallis who may be directed to strengthen Sir Robert Calder's squadron with *the Rochefort squadron and* as many ships *of his own* as will make them up to 15, *to cruise off Cape Finisterre from* 10 *to* 50 *leagues to the west.* To stand to the southward and westward with his own ships, at the same distance for 10 days. Cadiz to be left to Lord Nelson. 9th July."[1]

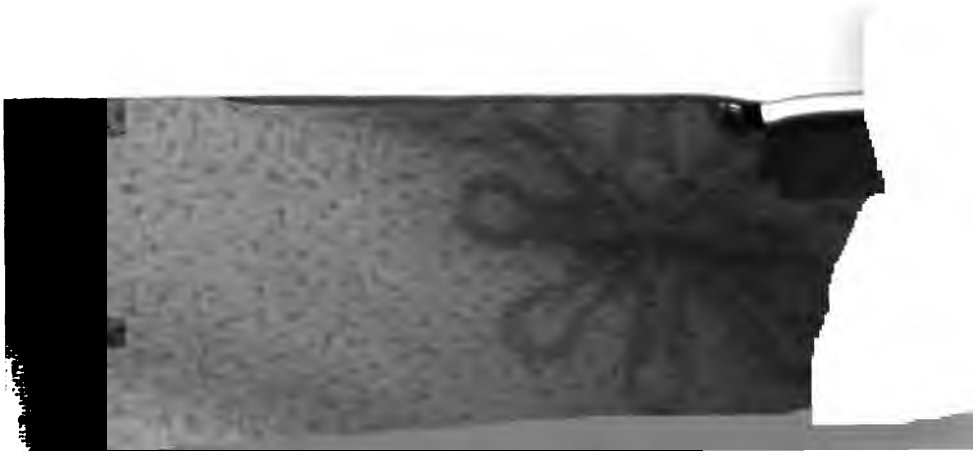
On the minute as thus amended the famous orders of July 9th were framed. No strategical decision has received more unanimous applause, yet now that we know Barham hesitated, it is open to any one to speculate as to which was the better alternative. As things turned out the first disposition would have met the case amply. It would have saved a deal of trouble from the Rochefort squadron and that trouble might well have been much worse than it was, for in the weeks before Trafalgar it seriously endangered Nelson's communications, and not only was it an abiding menace to our trade, but it came near to losing us the

[1] Facsimile in *Barham Papers*, iii. 257. The last interlineation must have been made before the minute was complete, for the penultimate sentence refers to it. The important change as to the Rochefort squadron must therefore have been made before it left his hands and without any one else's suggestion.

Cape of Good Hope. Yet such judgments *ex post facto* must be made with caution. It must be remembered that to devote a squadron to blockading Rochefort was to play Napoleon's game. It was what he expected and desired, and if Barham in his tried wisdom refused to permit any consideration to loosen his grip on the Ushant position few will be found to assert he was not right. "When in doubt make sure of the mouth of the Channel," was a maxim too long sanctified by its fruits to be lightly transgressed.

At all events it was approved at the time by his colleagues, though he did not wait for the order to go forward in the regular way. That not a moment might be lost he determined to send Cornwallis private authority to act at once. "Dear Sir," he wrote in hot haste, "If we are not too late, I think there is a chance of our intercepting the Toulon fleet. Nelson follows them to Cadiz, and if you can immediately unite the Ferrol and Rochefort squadrons, and order them to cruise from thirty to forty leagues to the westward, and stretch out with your own fleet as far, and continue six or eight days on that cruise and then return to your several posts, I think we have some chance of intercepting them. Official orders will follow as fast as possible. Yours, Barham. Time is everything."

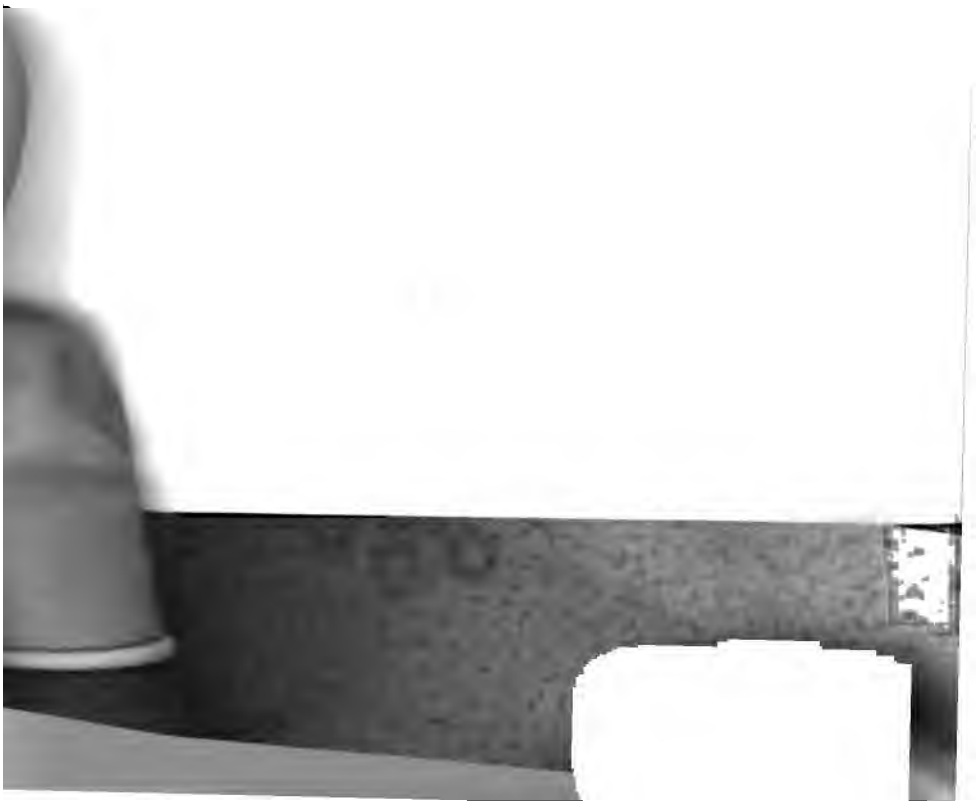
The official orders as eventually drafted ran as follows: "Admiral Cornwallis—Intelligence being received by H.M. Brig *Curieux* that the combined French and Spanish squadrons, which passed Antigua on the 8th ultimo, had been seen by that vessel in latitude 33° 12′ N., long. 58° W., steering at first N. by E. but afterwards altering their course to N.N.W.; and there being grounds to suppose that it is their intention to make some port in France or Spain; you are hereby required and directed to strengthen the squadron off Ferrol under the orders of Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Calder



with the ships off Rochefort under Rear-Admiral Stirling, and to instruct the Vice-Admiral to proceed without loss of time off Cape Finisterre, from whence he is to cruise for the enemy to the distance of 30 to 40 leagues to the westward for the space of six or eight days. You are further required and directed to stretch with the fleet under your immediate command about the same distance to the southwestward and for the same space of time; at the expiration of which the several squadrons are to return to their respective stations.—(Signed) Barham, J. Gambier, Garlies."[1]

It was all done in about three hours. By nine o'clock in the morning the Admiralty messenger was away, and as he thundered down the Portsmouth road Napoleon was in the act of leaving Turin for Boulogne "to change the destinies of the world."

[1] Draft in *Barham Papers*, iii. 259 and *note*. Barham's signature alone appears to be autograph. There must, certainly, have been some hurry and irregularity; for the order does not appear in the series of *Secret Orders* at the Record Office. It would look as though Barham would not waste half-an-hour to have it copied and that it did not go forward in the usual way through the Secretary. The laconic form in which the orders were drafted bears no trace of the established secretarial manner.



CHAPTER XIII

CORNWALLIS OPENS BREST

CORNWALLIS joined the fleet off Brest in the *Ville de Paris* 110[1] on July 7th, the same day that the *Curieux* reached Plymouth, and after Gardner took his leave he found nineteen of the line with his flag. On the 9th the *Terrible* 74, on her way home from Ferrol to refit, gave him the information, which Calder had obtained from the American Consul, that the enemy were under orders to move to Coruña to be ready for Villeneuve. Scarcely had he received this intimation, which told him that the hour of action was at hand, when a despatch vessel arrived from the Port Admiral at Plymouth with Bettesworth's news that Villeneuve was making for the Bay. Cornwallis immediately sent it on to Stirling and Calder, with a warning to be on their guard against being surprised or caught embayed. At the same time he was joined by Sir Richard Strachan in the *Cæsar* 80, whom he placed in command of an inshore squadron of five of the line. But no sooner was this disposition made than Barham's note arrived to upset it. By noon on the 11th the necessary directions were on their way to Stirling and Calder, and Cornwallis, having left a cruiser squadron of six sail to watch Brest, was moving out and away to the south-westward without waiting for the official orders.[2]

[1] This was not the ship Rodney took in 1782, but a new first-rate built at Chatham in 1795. On her pre-carronade armament she threw a broadside of 1236 lbs. With her 68-lb. carronades it must have been over 1500 lbs.

[2] *Barham Papers*, iii. 393.

With his flag he had now a splendid battle squadron of twenty sail, which, including as it did no less than seven three-deckers and three 80-gun ships, was greatly superior to that of Villeneuve and Gravina. His instructions, it will be remembered, as finally drafted were "to stand to the south-westward 30 to 40 leagues for 10 days," and he interpreted them with the freedom that was obviously intended. At first he stretched about south-south-west, "in the direct line for Finisterre," as Barham's original orders had provided. This course he held for about 100 miles and then turned up to the north-westward, crossing the natural approaches to Brest until he reached a rendezvous he had given from 70 to 80 miles south-west of Ushant, and there he remained till the evening of the 15th. So far not a sign of the enemy had been found, and Cornwallis seems to have conceived a strong impression that they were not making for Brest at all. No letter exists to enable us to see into his mind. All we know is that, leaving a cruiser on the rendezvous, he now stretched away south down to the latitude of Rochefort.

Of all the moves in the campaign none will seem quite so daring as this. It will be observed that it went somewhat beyond the orders which Barham had given him; to stretch 30 to 40 leagues south-west of Ushant. Cornwallis clearly had his own view of the most likely ground to secure his chief's objects, and he saw it approximately at a point where the latitude of Rochefort intersected the direct line between Ferrol and Ushant. In this position he might hope to intercept Villeneuve on two of his three possible courses. It was equally good whether the enemy made Ferrol and then came on to Brest, or was making for Rochefort direct and running down its latitude in the usual way. But to all appearance it left the direct line to Brest dangerously open at the critical moment. Still, that Villeneuve would take the direct line and not seek to

avoid an action by a more devious course was improbable, and in any case the approaches to that port were well covered by the squadron cruisers. What, however, seems the most serious risk of all was that the move left Ganteaume free to come out and reach the Channel. The danger looks all the more grave since, as we know, the last word which Ganteaume had had from Napoleon was a suggestion that he should attempt this very stroke the moment he saw a chance. Imagine, then, the excitement which Cornwallis's withdrawal caused at Paris when it was reported, quickly followed as it was by news of the disappearance of the squadron before Rochefort.

On July 10th, the very day that Cornwallis received the new disposition, Napoleon reached Fontainebleau. He had come in three days and a half from Turin; but for his eagerness it had not been nearly fast enough, and he was scolding at the state of the roads and grumbling that the Empress had insisted on stopping everywhere for her meals. Once at work again, plans poured out from him more feverishly than ever. The first was one for elaborating his feint from Holland by a sham expedition, which Marmont was to prepare at Helvoetsluys.[1] Next were produced a long set of instructions destined to meet Villeneuve off Ferrol. Once more it was impressed upon him that his object was to be master of the Straits of Dover, if it were only for four or five days. Wide discretion was given him in the means he might adopt. He might join both the Brest and Rochefort squadrons, or either of them, as he saw fit; and, if only the latter, he might go north-about and join the Texel squadron. If as the result of having to fight an action he found the object was beyond his power to attain, he was to content himself with releasing the Ferrol squadron and taking it down to Cadiz, but on no account was he to enter Ferrol. Clearly Napoleon was con-

[1] July 13th: Desbrière, iv. 639.

templating failure with an eye behind him on action in the Mediterranean, and Decrès' draft of the instructions emphasises the apprehension. "His Majesty," he wrote to Villeneuve, "desires that the fleet under your command shall carry through the great project of the invasion of England, conceived so long since by his genius, but so much time has gone by since the issue of your original orders, so many things may have happened, that in his wisdom the Emperor considers he should not give you an absolute order to that effect in spite of his persistence in this great design, but rather rely on your sagacity and boldness."[1]

Finally Allemand's orders were completely changed. In all probability the appearance of Villeneuve off the coast of Spain would cause the raising of the Rochefort blockade. Instead, however, of going out according to his previous instructions in order to make diversions on the coast of Ireland and in the Narrow Seas, he was to wait for the word from Gourdon and then go straight to Ferrol. But it was all too late. The day the order was penned Stirling moved away, and on the morrow Allemand, seeing the coast clear, put to sea—under his old instructions. In pursuance of them he pushed out due west straight for the point which Cornwallis had reached.

Meanwhile Napoleon had received another blow, which may well have been the cause of the doubtful tone in his order to Villeneuve. Ganteaume had sent him his answer to the theme he had propounded. If the Brest squadron got to sea should it rush the Channel, or should it go first to pick up the Ferrol squadron? Ganteaume knew too much of his profession to have the slightest doubt and too much character not to state it. "If," he wrote, "the fleet, in leaving Brest, was fortunate enough to elude the vigilance of the blockading squadron, there exists no doubt that it

[1] July 16th: Desbrière, iv. 642.

ought to make for Ferrol in preference to Rochefort. . . . But if, in accordance with the first part of the question in your despatch, we venture into the Channel with no more than twenty-two vessels which compose our fleet, it would not be long before we were observed, or before the vessels we had eluded would get contact. To these they would not have failed to join the whole of the force at their disposal on the coasts and in the ports of England, and then it seems to me the chances would be against us. The Channel is too narrow a sea to allow of being there without detection or of manœuvring with success in the face of superior force." Cornwallis, he calculated, had twenty-one sail, of which twelve were three-deckers, besides five of a supposed Irish squadron, and fifteen in reserve.[1] "To attempt," he continues, "an expedition so important as that of Boulogne in a sea so stormy as the Channel, and one which is not always practicable for the boats employed in that expedition, I think we must be able to count on having the passage free for at least a fortnight. With only twenty-one vessels we should be in constant fear of seeing thirty suddenly appear, whose force would be nearly double that of our fleet."[2] Here, then, from Ganteaume's own pen is reason enough why the movement opening Brest entailed little r Did Barham see into his mind when he gave the ord r Cornwallis when he more than obeyed it? It is not unlikely. At all events they knew that since 1744

[1] Desbrière, iv. 640, July 14th. Ganteaume's estimate appears to be based on a list that was afterwards printed in the *Naval Chronicle*, vol. xiv. It is an "Abstract of the British Efficient Naval Force," and purports, as there printed, to be corrected up to July 20th, but is not so corrected. It gives for the "English and Irish Channels" (that is, the squadrons of Cornwallis and Stirling and that of Ireland), 30 of the line, including 11 three-deckers. Those "In Port and Fitting," *i.e.* the Reserve, number 9 of the line, including the *Royal Sovereign*, besides half-a-dozen "guard-ships." The French Intelligence Department probably obtained the list from some other English newspaper. The Irish battle squadron no longer existed as a separate unit. It had been absorbed into the Western Squadron.

[2] Here he clearly counts three-deckers as 2 units. Thus 30 of the line with 12 three-deckers would equal 42 units. His own fleet was 22 with 1 three-decker, which would equal 23 units, but only 21 were ready.

no enemy, however numerous, had dared to penetrate the Channel with an undefeated fleet in its rear, and in that year it was only the weather that saved the French from destruction as it saved the Armada. Both cases ended in a disastrous *sauve qui peut*. It was the kernel of our traditional defensive strategy, as it stood firmly based on the Western Squadron. No fleet could hope to reach Dover without being brought to action, and the further it got the greater were the advantages of the home fleet and the more crushing the results of failure.

To such considerations Napoleon had always shut his eyes, and Ganteaume's reply filled him with resentment. "I cannot in the least understand Ganteaume's immobility," he wrote to Decrès on the 18th. "How is it possible that, he who is in possession of all my projects, lets the enemy disappear without making any movement? I anticipated in my instructions that the enemy must disappear from Brest. Now for four days, it seems, they have not been seen, and this, added to the disappearance of the Rochefort squadron, can hardly leave any doubt about Villeneuve's arrival." He was in a fever of impatience, for he believed the crisis had come some days earlier than he had expected. Decrès was therefore to send Ganteaume a peremptory order to drive off the British cruisers and see what was behind them. If he found the battle squadron had moved far out to meet Villeneuve he himself was to go straight to Boulogne.[1]

Two days later the Emperor heard from his spies of the arrival of the *Curieux* and the news she brought. It did nothing to shake his belief that Villeneuve was close at hand. It must be some other news that had led to the alteration of the British disposition, for he was convinced the Admiralty could not have made up their minds so quickly and got the orders off in time. It must be that

[1] Saint-Cloud, July 18th: *Correspondance*, xi. 22.

their home cruisers had located Villeneuve, and he issued orders for immediate action. Berthier was told to get the Grand Army embarked at once. "Every moment presses," Napoleon urged; "let the four Marshals know. There is no longer an instant to lose." The orders to Ganteaume were repeated with increasing emphasis. Napoleon himself wrote him a letter telling him he was to go out and fight any force before Brest, if he found it less than sixteen of the line. If the enemy were gone to Ferrol or far to sea to meet Villeneuve, he was to go straight to Boulogne. "There," he said in his sanguine way and in spite of what Ganteaume had written, "there all is prepared; and there, master of the sea for three days, you will enable us to end the destiny of England. . . . When you receive this letter we shall be in person at Boulogne-sur-Mer, and all will be on board and moored outside."

Surely never did a great commander talk more wildly. Had he lost his head, or was it just a theatrical display? The picture he painted had no relation whatever to the actual possibilities of the situation. The flotilla returns of July 22nd and August 3rd show that he had filled the ports of embarkation with over two thousand vessels of all kinds, scheduled to carry some 150,000 men and nearly 10,000 horses.[1] So vast a throng of shipping fairly choked the ports, and yet more were under orders to concentrate from the Flemish depôts. Elaborate organisations existed on paper, plan had succeeded plan, all beautifully symmetrical but none of them corresponding in the least to the conditions which actually existed. Instead of 150,000 men ready to embark, there were only 90,000; instead of 10,000 horses, there were less than 3000. Boulogne itself was blocked with transport for 73,000 men, and there were only 45,000 to use it. Worse still, no one had any idea how long it would take to get the flotilla to sea. The

[1] Desbrière, iv. 465–6.

movement had never been tried as a whole; no plan of operation had yet been settled, and it passed the wit of man to devise one.[1]

"If, then"—so runs the judgment of those best able to decide—"in an organisation essential for the success of his enterprise, where order and rapidity of embarkation were factors of the first importance, his genius indulged itself in systems simply symmetrical, bearing no relation either to the actual state of the troops and their service, or to the means of embarkation accumulated in the ports, we must surely ask ourselves if he ever seriously intended to make a sudden departure."[2]

What indeed could he have meant? In spite of his assurance to Ganteaume, he made no attempt to leave Paris, and yet the orders were not withdrawn. It mattered little, for before the Admiral could act on them, Cornwallis had completed his eight days' cast for Villeneuve and was back again before the port.

After reaching the latitude of Rochefort on July 16th he did not remain there, but began working back at once towards the north-east, with his fleet disposed in battle order and exercising battle tactics. On the 18th he returned to his assigned position from thirty to forty leagues south-west of Ushant, and in this region he remained cruising to and fro in open order. On the 20th, as his advanced ships could find nothing, he sent frigates to look into Rochefort and L'Orient, while he continued to hold his cruising ground two days more. Then as his allotted time was expiring, he began to make back to his Ushant position, and on the morning of the 24th he showed himself again to the Brest signal stations.[3]

[1] *Appareillage général de la flottille impériale.* August 3rd (Desbrière, iv. 398). Of this the Editor says: "Such a report is past comment; the contradictions and material errors are altogether too glaring." Lord Keith calculated the Boulogne flotilla would take six tides to get out.—*Barham Papers*, iii. 141, 181.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 466.

[3] Cornwallis's *Journal* and *Log of the Ville de Paris.*

So Barham's plan was justified in the result. So great is the advantage of secrecy with a blockading fleet that he might well be sure that Ganteaume would not be able to detect the movement in time to act before it was over. And if he had done so? If he had acted on Napoleon's orders and stolen up Channel? It could only have meant his destruction, as he himself well knew. Cornwallis's frigates would quickly have warned him, and with his seasoned crews and knowledge of the Channel he must surely have overtaken Ganteaume and crushed him with his superior force and training. And if Ganteaume had reached Boulogne uncaught, and the flotilla with no settled method or organisation had tried to cross? Why, then, there must have been, with the aid of Keith's squadron in the Downs, a tragedy almost without parallel in the history of war. There is nothing to show that Barham deliberately set the trap, but trap it was; and so far as the evidence goes, Napoleon was only kept from leaping blindly into it by the crafty French seamen whom he treated with so much contempt.

CHAPTER XIV

CALDER'S ACTION

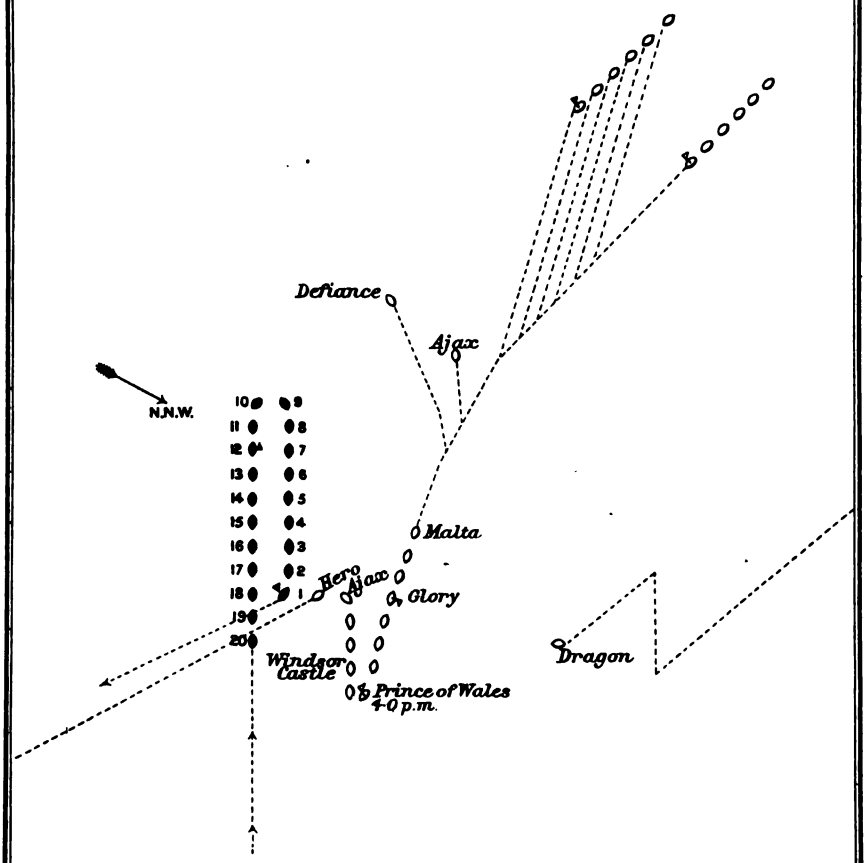
With Ganteaume still held fast in Brest it was to Villeneuve and the Ferrol concentration that Napoleon had to look. But there Barham's design had proved equally successful. On July 22nd, as Cornwallis was closing in again to resume his close blockade, the blow had fallen which was to prove decisive of the campaign, so far at least as concerned Napoleon's offensive action against England.

Calder's action off Finisterre is one that has been little regarded. Dimly seen in the penumbra of Trafalgar, and through the cloud of a court-martial, which had nothing to do with it, its tactical significance has escaped serious investigation. Yet its place in the history of tactics was surely worth appraising, if only for the sake of the school to which Calder belonged. The three schools under which the final development of sailing tactics had taken place were those of Rodney, Howe, and Jervis. Rodney's, after a long and successful rivalry, had been supplanted by that of Howe. The finish and precision which Kempenfelt's genius had given its system had carried it beyond anything that had yet been seen, and it still dominated the service. Of this school Nelson was an adherent, if indeed his eclectic mind can be said to have belonged to anything less than all schools. He certainly had a strong leaning to the free-handed school of Jervis, which differed widely from the

CALDER'S ACTION

July 22nd

o British Ships.
• French ,,



1 Argonaute
2 Terrible
3 America
4 España
5 San Raphael
6 Firme
7 Pluton
8 Mont Blanc
9 Atlas
10 Berwick
11 Neptune
12 Bucentaure
13 Formidable
14 Intrépide
15 Scipion
16 Swiftsure
17 Indomptable
18 Aigle
19 Achille
20 Algéziras

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other two, and it was in this school that Calder had been trained. It is, therefore, no matter of surprise if a study of the facts should suggest that the experience of this neglected action was at the bottom of the most brilliant conception of the Trafalgar memorandum. In any case the indications of its influence on the tactics which Nelson employed are striking enough to call for the closest attention to every attainable detail.

It was in the evening of July 12th that the cruiser which Cornwallis sent to Stirling brought him his orders to raise the blockade of Rochefort and join Calder.[1] In the night he slipped away, and on the 15th, as Cornwallis was making his bold stretch to the southward, Barham's second concentration was complete. Waiting only an hour or two for darkness to conceal his movement, Calder stole away in his turn for his appointed station to the westward, leaving a brig to keep a close watch on the Ferrol squadron.

His own force now numbered, besides four cruisers, fifteen of the line, of which four were of 98 guns, and one, the *Malta*, a splendid 80-gun ship of greater burden than any of the three-deckers.[2] The remaining ten, with the exception of the *Dragon*, a powerful seventy-four, were all small and old two-deckers, two being of sixty guns only. Still as the combined force he was to meet was supposed to number only sixteen with no three-deckers, he could go on his way with a light heart, so far at least as Villeneuve's fleet was concerned.

[1] *Log of the Glory.* Letters of First Lieutenant of *Egyptienne: Blockade of Brest*, ii. 313. At the court-martial Stirling said he could not remember the date, but agreed it must have been the 12th.

[2] As the *Guillaume Tell* and the last survivor of the Nile, she had struck to the *Foudroyant* in 1800. The *Malta* by English "Burden" measurement was 2255 tons against an average of 2000 of the 98's, but the 98's, of course, had a higher "displacement." When she received her carronades on being brought into the service she threw a broadside of 1200 lbs., or about 200 lbs. more than the 98's.

With what he was leaving behind him it was different. Stirling had to report that at Rochefort he had left nine of the line and several frigates ready to sail, and there was now nothing to prevent their joining the Combined Squadron in Ferrol. He knew, moreover, that a chain of signal stations had been established from Ferrol westward along the coast in order to give warning of Villeneuve's approach, and enable Gourdon to come out to meet him the moment he appeared. His only chance of success then was to strike and crush Villeneuve before he could make the land and get touch with Ferrol. It was to this end that Barham had directed that he should proceed off Cape Finisterre, and cruise thence thirty or forty leagues to the westward for six or eight days.[1]

By July 19th he was already about a hundred miles west by north of Finisterre. Here he got fresh news of Nelson just a month old. On June 17th, when Nelson was about six hundred miles north from Antigua in chase of Villeneuve, he had spoken an American cutter which had seen the Combined Squadron on its way home three days before. Any doubt which Nelson may have had of his adversary's destination was thus removed. He believed indeed he was hard on Villeneuve's heels, and must catch him before he could make his port. Full of this hope, on June 19th, he had sent away the *Martin* sloop to warn Gibraltar and the Mediterranean, and the *Decade* frigate to carry the news to Lisbon for Ferrol and Ushant.

This news now reached Calder by the Lisbon packet, and he began to work north-westward to cross Villeneuve's probable track, believing he must be somewhere close at hand. Nor was he mistaken. On the 12th, the day Stirling left Rochefort, Villeneuve had actually been within three hundred miles of the coast about due west of Oporto,

[1] Court-martial, Calder's defence; *Naval Chronicle*, xv. 164. Lords of the Admiralty to Cornwallis, July 9th: *Barham Papers* (*ante*, p. 200).

but there the prevailing northerly winds forced him to go about, and for four days he had to stretch back to the westward before he could make his latitude.[1] It was not till the 17th that he was again able to head to the eastward for Ferrol.

On the morning of the 22nd Calder was some three hundred miles west by north of that port. Here having reached the limit of his cruising ground he wore S.W. by W., and expecting contact at any moment signalled for the fleet to prepare for action and to close.[2] He had two advanced ships, the *Defiance* and *Ajax*, and his two frigates spread as usual six or seven miles ahead, while the *Dragon*, his best seventy-four, had been chasing a strange sail about the same distance to leeward. The wind was light, about north-west, and the weather misty enough to reduce the range of vision very low. But shortly before noon the *Defiance* was able to make the signal for a strange fleet of twenty-four sail and then twenty-seven to the south-south-west. Calder at once bore away towards them to the south-west, and as he did so he formed close order of sailing in two columns and cleared for action.[3]

The noon positions of the opposed flagships show that the bodies of the two fleets were then about sixteen miles

[1] See the chart in Desbrière, *Trafalgar*, p. 50.

[2] Signal 52: "Keep in closer order by closing towards the leading ship or Admiral." The fleet was, of course, cruising at the time and not in order of sailing. In cruising each division followed its flag in no regular formation.

[3] By the *Signal Book* Instructions of 1799 the intervals in close order were to be from 1½ to 2 cables (*i.e.* 300–400 yards), Art. xix. p. 121. Art. ii., p 127, gives it at 2 cables, and the distance between the columns as a mile and a half. The diagram (Plate I.), however, which gives a fleet of fifteen sail exactly the same as Calder's shows a mile only between the columns. The practice probably was to vary it with the size of the fleet. (See *A System of Naval Tactics*, 1797, p. 170.) Length of ships of the line averaged about 60 yards. Eight ships with seven intervals of 2 cables gave a column 3280 yards long—that is, 1·64 mile on sea reckoning of 10 cables to the mile. Calder's fleet in close order must have covered about 1½ square miles. In open order the intervals were from 3 to 4 cables, which with eight ships might give a line of over 3 miles.

apart, and so thick was the weather that for two hours neither could make anything of the other. Villeneuve had his squadron in sailing order in three columns, the Spaniards to starboard and to leeward, and a light division of two of the line and two frigates thrown forward.[1] His course was about east direct for Ferrol, but when his light division reported the advanced ships of the enemy he altered it like Calder more towards them to find out what they were. About one o'clock his light division was able to report a British fleet of twenty-one sail approaching him, whereupon he signalled to form the close-hauled line of battle on the Spaniards and to clear for action. At this time it became brighter, and the *Defiance* and *Ajax* were able to make out the strangers definitely as an enemy with ships of the line. On taking in their signal Calder merely reduced his intervals by half a cable and held on as he was.[2] No attempt was made to weather his opponent, his intention being apparently to interpose his squadron between Villeneuve and Ferrol and to engage him to leeward.

As yet neither could make sure of the other's battle force. The weather had thickened again so much that the two fleets could only just see each other dimly through the mist. As the Combined Squadron formed the close-hauled line of battle with the wind now at west-north-west, it was of course heading to the northward. Gravina himself was leading, and the two fleets thus held on towards each other for an hour in the fog. It was not till past two o'clock that it began to lift again, and then Calder's advanced frigates, which had run down the enemy's line, were able to signal his exact force. Villeneuve had ordered his light division to fall into station in the rear,

[1] Galiano, *Revista General de Marina*, 1908, p. 477 *note*.

[2] Signal 52: "To keep in closer order." By Instruction xix., p. 121, every time this signal was made the ships closed half a cable.

and the frigates had counted from twenty to twenty-two of the line.[1]

To the British Admiral so large a force must have been a severe surprise, and since his reputation for hard fighting afterwards fell so low, it is agreeable to draw close attention to the spirit with which he dealt with the unexpected situation. In effect that situation was that he found a numerically superior fleet coming up close-hauled to windward of him, and an action imminent. The last word of Lord Howe and Kempenfelt on the subject had been that the proper thing to do in these circumstances was to attack the van and the rear to prevent being doubled on, and to leave the centre alone; or if the organisation was in three divisions, the centre was to engage so much of the enemy's centre as it could.[2] In other words they adopted Lord Torrington's famous principle. But this Calder did not

[1] The lines of battle were as follows :—

BRITISH.		FRANCO-SPANISH.		
Hero (74)	Alan Gardner.	ARGONAUTE (80)	Gravina (flag).	Starboard.
Ajax (74)	Will. Brown.	Terrible (70)	Mondroyon.	
Triumph (74)	Henry Inman.	America (61)	Darrac.	
Barfleur (98)	Geo. Martin.	España (64)	Monios.	
Agamemnon (64)	John Harvey.	S. Raphael (80)	Montès.	
Windsor Castle (98)	Chas. Boyles.	Firme (71)	Villa Vicentio.	
Defiance (74)	P. C. Durham.	Pluton (74)	Cosmard.	Centre.
PRINCE OF WALES (98)	V.-A. Calder.	Mont Blanc (74)	Lavillegris.	
	V.-A. Nugent (Capt. of the Fleet).	Atlas (74)	Rolland.	
		Berwick (74)	Camus.	
	Will. Cuming (Flag-Capt.).	Neptune (80)	Maistrol.	
		BUCENTAURE (80)	Villeneuve (flag).	
Repulse (74)	A. K. Legge.	FORMIDABLE (80)	Dumanoir (flag).	Lee.
Raisonnable (64)	Josias Rowley.	Intrépide (74)	Déperonne.	
Dragon (74)	Ed. Griffith.	Scipion (74)	Bérenger.	
GLORY (98)	R.-A. Stirling. Capt. Warren.	Swiftsure (74)	Villemadrin.	
Warrior (74)	S. H. Linzee.	Indomptable (80)	Gourreges.	Light.
Thunderer (74)	W. Letchmere.	Aigle (74)	Hubert.	
Malta (80)	Ed. Buller.	Achille (74)	Deméport.	
		ALGEÇIRAS (74)	Magon (flag).	

[2] *Signal and Instructions* (*Navy Records Society*), pp, 77, 108, 120, 134, 173. 319, 328–9.

choose to do. He was not of the Howe-Kempenfelt school. His battle experience had been gained as Jervis's first-captain at St. Vincent on the famous Valentine's Day, and it was but natural that he should share Jervis's mistrust of formal tactics. Instead, therefore, of accepting the recognised form of attack—and in spite of the enemy's force no thought but attack was in his mind—he chose to do what Nelson did at Trafalgar and concentrate on the enemy's rear and centre. The effect would be to engage the part of the enemy's line which was not yet formed and to leave the Spaniards alone. How far these considerations were in his mind we cannot tell, but we may at least credit him with the bold and original resolution he took.

Towards half-past three the two fleets were about eight miles apart and bore from each other about N.E. and S.W. Calder still made no attempt to get to windward, but after calling in his advanced ships he signalled to prepare to engage, and then to form the order of battle to the south-south-west, a course which led him frankly to leeward.[1] A few minutes later he signalled for another point to starboard, and then the fog closed down again and once more the two fleets lost sight of each other. When it lifted a quarter of an hour later they found themselves running nearly parallel on opposite tacks just out of gunshot.

For Villeneuve the line Calder was taking could have but one meaning. Dominated as French naval opinion was, and as opinion must always tend to be everywhere, by the last great action, he was convinced that the tactics of the Nile were in the British Admiral's mind and that Calder

[1] James says at 3.22 he made the signal "to tack together," which would look as though he wanted to get to windward. It was really hoisted with the preparative and was annulled at 3.30. At 3.33 he made to the Starboard division No. 93, "Make as much sail as can be carried without breaking the order in which the fleet is formed," with compass signal S.S.W. This was the regular movement in forming line of battle to enable weather division to get ahead of the lee. At 3.43 "Line of battle in open order."

meant to double on his rear.[1] It was not yet in order, and with a view of supporting it Villeneuve passed orders up the line to Gravina for the fleet to wear in succession the moment he heard firing in the rear. It happened, however, that Gravina just then caught sight of a French frigate through the mist repeating the preparative signal that had been made, and luckily for Villeneuve he began the movement immediately.[2] At the same moment the *Hero*, which was leading the British line—an old and weak seventy-four under Captain Alan Gardner—had reached the enemy's centre, and Calder, seeing the moment had come for his manœuvre, signalled to tack in succession. His object was to bring his fleet close under the lee of the part he meant to engage and on the same tack as the enemy, and directly the signal was hauled down, he hoisted "Engage the enemy's centre," and a quarter of an hour later "Close order."[3]

Thus not till the last moment did he let his captains know the plan of attack, and it so happened that the van ships did not take in the determinative signal to engage the centre. In the log of Captain Gardner it does not appear at all; in that of the *Ajax*, who had taken her station astern of him, it stands simply as "engage the enemy." The fact was that before the signal could reach Gardner at the head of the line he had been driven to act on his own initiative. As he led to the northward along the enemy's line he suddenly became aware of a large Spanish ship coming down upon him free upon the opposite tack. It was Gravina's own flagship as she led the movement to save the French rear. Here, then, was Calder's intended attack completely parried. It was too thick for

[1] Duro, *Armada Española*, viii. 291.

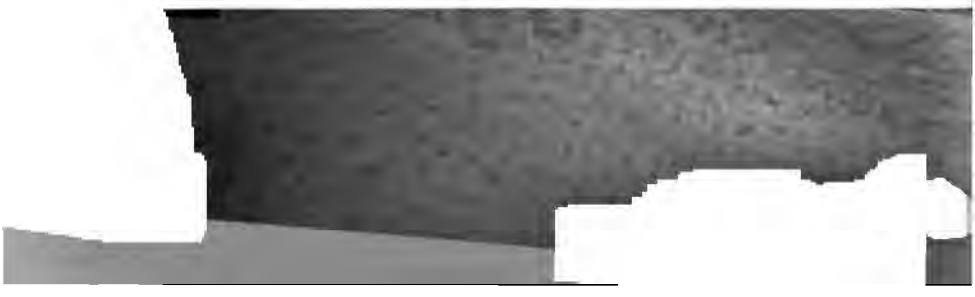
[2] The promptitude with which this manœuvre was executed is attributed to the foresight of Gravina's chief of the staff, Escaño, in a MS. *Elogio de Don Antonio Escaño*, quoted by General Galiano.

[3] This meant anything from a cable to half a cable according to the weather.

the Admiral to see what was happening, nor could Gardner see Calder's flagship. What was he to do? If he held on the fleets would pass again on opposite tacks, a form of engaging which had long been condemned as incapable of producing a decisive result. He determined, therefore, on his own responsibility to go about and lead the fleet on the same tack as the enemy. Before he could get round Gravina was upon him, and gave him a broadside while he was still in stays. Fortunately the Spanish flagship had got a list to port from bad stowage, and her fire was not well enough directed to do much harm. Gardner was, therefore, able to continue the movement, and in this way about five o'clock the action began, but in an entirely different form from that which Calder had intended.

Immediately after opening fire Gravina found he had reached the rearmost ship of his own fleet, and in accordance with verbal orders he had received from Villeneuve in passing, he hauled to the wind and stood west-south-west across the French wake to cover their rear. It was not for three-quarters of an hour that Calder knew what had happened. At that time he was hailed by the *Ajax*, the *Hero's* second astern, who had tacked after Gardner. She, however, had hove-to, and getting engaged with two of the enemy she had been driven out of the line to leeward, and had thought best to bear up to warn the Admiral, who had just reached the point for tacking.[1] There was nothing for it now but to confirm the movement. By this time six ships had followed Gardner's lead. The flagship was the

[1] James (vol. iii. 360) says the *Ajax* tacked at 5.45 and immediately bore up to the Admiral instead of supporting Gardner, and he condemns Captain Brown for his conduct. But Brown's Log says he began to engage at 5.35, tacked at 5.50, and hove-to abreast of two two-deckers, one on the weather bow and one on the weather quarter, and there remained "engaging the enemy as they came up out of the fog." He certainly lost more heavily than any ship of his size. The *Ajax's* time must have been ahead of that of the flagship. James did not observe this. He says *Ajax* tacked at 5.45, and that by 5.50 (Calder's time) six ships had tacked!



seventh, and Calder, hoisting the "General" to tack in succession, went about himself.

Thus his well-meant attack was spoiled by circumstances over which he had no control, and by the accident of Gravina's tacking before Villeneuve intended. Calder was now committed to a concentration on the van and centre, an evil method of engaging which led inevitably to a counter concentration on his own rear as the enemy's rear came up. He had, moreover, only twelve ships in action. The *Hero* as well as the *Ajax* had been driven out of the line before he himself tacked, and the *Barfleur* 98, the fourth ship, was now at grips with Gravina. And not only were the two weak leading ships gone, but the powerful *Dragon* was still beating up from to leeward, and indeed did not succeed in rejoining till the action was over.

The *Malta* in the extreme rear brought up against the twelfth ship of the enemy's line, which happened to be the headmost of their rear, also an 80-gun ship, carrying the flag of Rear-Admiral Dumanoir, but most of the French rear never got into action. Thus after all Calder had succeeded in attacking an equal part of the enemy's line, but what happened afterwards no one could tell even approximately. The fog settled down again thicker than ever as the fleets stood away to the west-south-west closely engaged. For the most part they could not even see what they were firing at, and let fly at the flashes of each other's guns. Villeneuve himself as he came about did not know whether the enemy were to port or starboard. Friend could hardly be told from foe. The *Malta* as she rounded into action fired on a British frigate. So the blind fight went on till the night closed down upon it, and it was not till nine o'clock that all was still.

By that time the British found themselves in possession of the two rearmost ships of the Spanish squadron, which after an heroic resistance had fallen to leeward disabled into

the midst of the British fleet. It was the *Windsor Castle* 98, it would seem, that had contributed most to the success and suffered most severely, losing her foretopmast and forty-four men killed and wounded. "She did splendidly," said an officer who was present, and to judge by the casualties, it was she and another three-decker—the *Prince of Wales*—that did most of the damage. Nowhere else was much harm done, except in the British rear. Here the *Malta*, in the place of honour, with the *Thunderer* 74 next ahead, suffered the inevitable concentration, but not without inflicting serious loss upon their adversaries. Both ships, however, were severely cut up, and the *Malta* lost as many men as the *Windsor Castle*.[1]

[1] The following returns of casualties will assist in showing where the brunt of the action fell :—

BRITISH.	Killed.	Wounded.
Hero (74)	1	4
Ajax (74)	2	16
Triumph (74)	5	6
Barfleur (98)	3	7
Agamemnon (64)	0	3
Windsor Castle (98)	10	35
Defiance (74)	1	7
Prince of Wales (98)	3	20
Repulse (74)	0	4
Raisonnable (64)	1	1
Glory (98)	1	1
Warrior (74)	0	0
Thunderer (74)	7	21
Malta (80)	5	40
	41	158
Dragon (74)	Not in action, 4 wounded by explosion.	

FRANCO-SPANISH.	Killed.	Wounded.
Argonaute (80)	6	5
Terrible (70)	1	7
America (61)	5	13
España (64)	5	10
S. Raphael (80)	53	114
Firme (71)	41	97
Pluton (74)	8	22
Mont Blanc (74)	6	11
Atlas (74)	10	32
Berwick (74)	2	8
Neptune (80)	1	7
Bucentaure (80)	3	3
Formidable (80)	4	6
Intrépide (74)	5	5
Scipion (74)	0	0
Swiftsure (74)	0	0
Indomptable (89)	1	1
Aigle (74)	4	0
Achille (74)	0	0
Algeçiras (74)	0	0
	155	341

Total.				
British	41 killed.	158 wounded.		
Spanish	111 „	246 „	155 killed	341 wounded.
French	44 „	95 „		

The *Formidable* and *Atlas* both lost their captains killed.

"A very decisive action," Calder wrote in his despatch next morning, "which lasted upwards of four hours, when I found it necessary to bring-to the squadron to cover the captured ships." Villeneuve saw it differently. "The enemy then made off," he wrote in his report. "He had had several vessels crippled aloft, and the field of battle remained ours. Cries of joy and victory were heard from all our ships."[1]

The claim of neither Admiral was ever endorsed by competent opinion. Events, it is true, went far, at least strategically, to justify Calder's boast that the action was decisive, but Villeneuve's vaunt of retaining possession of the field had no justification. The actual result of the battle was that Calder had maintained his position, barring Villeneuve's approach to Ferrol and the Galician signal stations; he had captured two of the line from a superior force, and had inflicted on his enemy three times the loss he himself had sustained. So far Calder had certainly won a victory. His conduct in the action received the commendation of the Admiralty, and was never called in question. He certainly believed he had done well, and in the early hours of the night sent word down the fleet that he meant to renew the battle in the morning.

[1] By far the best account of the action is that given by James, iii. 360 *et seq.* That which Admiral Ekins attempted (*Naval Battles*, p. 662) is grotesque. He says he could get no very clear or satisfactory account from the captains engaged, except that all agreed it was a very ill-conducted action. Colonel Desbrière, like Ekins, unfortunately thought Gravina tacked instead of wearing, and his diagrams are therefore misleading. General Galiano (*El Combate de Trafalgar*) corrects this error in his diagram. Both he and Desbrière give the invaluable report of Captain Escaño, Gravina's Chief of the Staff, which for the first time renders a trustworthy account of the battle possible (*Trafalgar, Appendix of Documents*, p. 3). Villeneuve's and other accounts are in his *Projets et Tentatives*, iv. ch. xiv. Gravina's account, another by Lieut. Popham, and Calder's private letters to Barham are in *Barham Papers*, iii. 259 *et seq.* Mr. Leyland, in his *Blockade of Brest*, vol. ii., prints Calder's account, and two fuller reports by officers in the *Egyptienne* repeating frigate. Calder's *Journal* is missing, but the *Logs* of all the ships are in the Record Office. General Galiano prints the reports of the captains of the two captured vessels *San Raphael* and *Firme*.

When day broke, however, he found his fleet widely scattered. The van were far away to windward towards the distant enemy; the frigates and prizes, together with the *Windsor Castle* and *Thunderer*, were out of sight somewhere to leeward. To add to his anxiety for their safety the returns of damages to rigging which he received were so serious as to forbid an attempt to work to windward, and he decided that his only course was to call down the van and then bear up to get in touch with the cripples to leeward.

As had happened so fatally in Byng's case Calder's first spirited determination to renew the action had been weakened by secondary considerations when the stir of excitement was over. The despatch which he now resolved to send to Cornwallis exactly explains his altered view of the situation. "The enemy," he wrote, "are now in sight to windward, and when I have secured the captured ships and put the squadron to rights I shall endeavour to avail myself of every opportunity that may offer to give you some further account of these combined squadrons. At the same time it will behove me to be on my guard against the combined squadrons at Ferrol, as I am led to believe they have sent off one or two of their crippled ships last night for that port. Therefore possibly I may find it necessary to make a junction with you immediately off Ushant with the whole squadron. *P.S.* I am under the necessity of sending the *Windsor Castle* to you in consequence of the damage she sustained in the action." [1]

On the morrow no such opportunity as he indicated occurred. It is true that Villeneuve did make some show of renewing the action, but he always asserted that Calder refused to let him close. Calder, on the other hand, maintained that Villeneuve, with all the advantage of the weather position, refused to come within reach of him. On the 24th

[1] *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 312. For his private letters, see *Barham Papers*, iii. 259.

the wind shifted in Calder's favour, but still he made no attempt to engage. The enemy was barely in sight and in his opinion it was out of his power to force an action without risking his prizes and crippled ships or permitting Villeneuve to get touch with the Spanish signal stations. His view was that so long as he maintained a position which forbade Villeneuve to gain his object without fighting, he secured the fruits of his victory. He always contended that in this resolution he followed the example of Howe and Jervis. Neither the one after the First of June, nor the other after St. Vincent, had behaved differently, and yet neither Howe nor Jervis had a second equal and unshaken fleet threatening him from behind. "Circumstanced as I was," he said, "it appeared to me to be impracticable to force the enemy to action with such advantage as would justify me, even if I had nothing to apprehend but the opposing squadron. But when I reflected that sixteen sail were at Ferrol, who might have come out to the assistance of the combined fleet, or . . . . be pushing to England, the invasion of which was an event daily expected, I felt by renewing the action I should run too great a hazard and put my fleet in a state of danger which I could not have been justified for doing. I therefore thought it best to keep my squadron together and not to force the enemy to a second engagement till a more favourable opportunity. At the same time conceiving that their object was to join the ships at Ferrol, I determined to prevent them."

This he certainly did. On the morning of the 25th the two fleets were no longer in sight of one another; wind and sea were rising; and Villeneuve, fearing for his shattered ships, resolved to abandon the attempt to hold up for Ferrol and bear away for Cadiz instead. Even this, as the weather grew wilder every hour, soon seemed too great a hazard. Gravina was consulted as to the possibility of

getting into Vigo, and the result of the conference was that they turned back and ran for that port for refuge.

Of this movement Calder could have no knowledge. His two frigates were too deeply engaged with the crippled ships to keep touch with the enemy, and all he knew was that the Combined Squadron had disappeared to the southward. In the circumstances he could not but think that he had done all that was required. In a successful action he had maintained the vital Finisterre position; he had foiled the Ferrol concentration, and he felt that he could take his own line. His first care was to see the *Windsor Castle* and his two prizes as far to the northward on their way home as would render them reasonably safe from attack either from Rochefort or Ferrol. This done he held away back for the original rendezvous Cornwallis had given him in hope of getting in touch with Nelson, who might be expected to appear any day. If Nelson was not to be found it was his intention to return off Ferrol.

What judgment must be passed on Calder's conduct? It is probably one of the most difficult cases in history—a case of delicate choice between the primary object of destroying the enemy's fleet and the ulterior object of defending England against invasion. Most modern writers condemn him out of hand as a man of little heart, who did what was obviously the wrong thing from sheer pusillanimity. His brother officers, after hearing the evidence for three days and being in touch with the sentiment of that golden time, were not so sure. For six hours they sat in secret and anxious debate before a decision was reached, and then they condemned him to be reprimanded. But for what? "For not having done his utmost to renew the said engagement and to take and destroy every ship of the enemy." With that he was charged, and of that he was assuredly guilty. But in Calder's view, to put the

charge in that way was to beg the whole question. In his view it was his duty in the circumstances not to renew the action and not to try to destroy every ship of the enemy. His duty was to keep his fleet in being and prevent the enemy getting to Ferrol. The modern conception of warfare is such that probably any tribunal of naval officers would condemn him again to-day, but in those days the creed of the primary object was not so ripe. To condemn Calder for a mistake is one thing; to brand him as a faint-hearted blunderer is another.

He himself believed that, like Byng, he was the victim of popular outcry. In publishing his despatch the Admiralty had suppressed the last passage which hinted at the possibility of his not being able to renew the action. The country consequently in a condition of elated expectation was looking every day to hear of the completion of the victory, and what they got was news of a retreat. The revulsion of the disappointment, he always maintained, was what hounded him to his fate. But the truth is the Admiralty and Government were at one with public opinion; and now that we know the soul of Barham's plan we can see why it was so. He had taken great risks to secure a great moral result. His object was to establish an abiding dread that though hostile squadrons might slip out of their blockaded ports, the penalty of their success would be never to return. At the cost of a sacrifice admirably judged he had placed Calder in a position to secure that end, and Calder had not secured it. At the psychological moment he had looked behind him in confused anxiety for matters which did not concern him, and for which Barham had provided amply. It was a lapse of warlike spirit for which it was impossible to forgive him, and a court-martial was inevitable.

His real defence was never raised. It was, that the situation, the real inner intent of Barham's orders, was never explained to him, and he did not know that his one

and only duty, whatever the result to his own fleet, was if he once got hold never to let go so long as he had a tooth left.

This principle—to fight to a finish when in doubt—has become an axiom in modern naval opinion, but it was scarcely so when Calder fought. The hardest part of his case is that he fought the action under one standard, and was tried for it under another. Between the action and the court-martial Nelson fought and won Trafalgar. Trafalgar set up an ideal of hot-pressed action and a sentiment of confident superiority which did not exist when Calder fought, anywhere but in Nelson and his band of brothers. Nelson, of course, had no doubt in the matter, and deeply as he sympathised with Calder he put his finger at once upon the black spot. "He appears," so he wrote to the Second Sea Lord, "to have had the ships at Ferrol more in his head than the squadron in sight. . . . He lays stress upon other considerations than fighting the enemy's squadron, if he could have done it, *which he denies to be possible.* I have ventured to recommend Calder to keep to that; *prove it* and his character is retrieved."[1] In Nelson's eyes, then, the one and only excuse for not concentrating effort on the squadron in sight was the impossibility of bringing it to action. He himself would certainly have gone at Villeneuve again, and so would Monck in older days; but can we say with any confidence there were two flag-officers in the service at the time who would not have erred with Calder, knowing only what Calder knew. The better way, then, is not to indulge in facile condemnation, but to try to realise with humility the tremendous power upon overwrought nerves of the "considerations other than fighting" which led him astray. So may a man best strengthen himself against doing likewise in like case.

[1] Nelson to Gambier, Oct. 2, in Chatterton's *Memorials of Gambier*, ii. 4.

CHAPTER XV

MOVEMENTS AFTER CALDER'S ACTION

DEFENSIBLE or indefensible, Calder's misapprehension of what was required of him had brought to the ground Barham's bold conception for a counter-stroke. Napoleon's plan to all appearance had so far succeeded that we were thrust back upon the defensive, and nothing in the campaign is more interesting than the automatic manner in which the wide-flung fleet shrank back to the strategical centre, to meet the threatening concentration.

Nelson was the first to move. Convinced like Barham that Villeneuve's destination was Cadiz, he had set his course from Antigua straight for Cape St. Vincent, sure that the best way to bring his chase to action was to make that landfall before him. "The enemy," wrote Captain Bayntun of the *Leviathan* on June 21st to Nelson, after he had got wind of Villeneuve from the American skipper, "the enemy cannot be far ahead, and by our taking a more easterly direction it is possible (if he be bound that way), we may arrive off St. Vincent before him. Your lordship each night forms a part of his dreams."[1] The *Decade*, which he had sent on to Lisbon, was to meet him at the cape. He made it on July 17th, but of the enemy there was no news whatever, except that Missiessy had got back to Rochefort two months since. Nothing had been heard of Villeneuve, and after sending to communicate with Collingwood, Nelson moved down to Gibraltar to renew his

[1] *Nelson Papers: Add. MSS.* 34930.

stores. On the 20th he went ashore—being the first time for all but two years that he had set foot out of the *Victory*. He had still a remnant of hope that he had forestalled Villeneuve, and would be able to fight him as he approached the Straits; but he now received a letter of welcome from Collingwood containing an appreciation of the situation which differed entirely from his own.

Throughout the war Collingwood's service had been in the Channel, and his ideas inevitably took the colour of his station. This station bias appears to be as constant as anything in war—a condition of the human factor that has to be taken into account. Every commander is predisposed to see in his own theatre of operations the objective of those of the enemy; and as Nelson, against the balance of probability as it seems to us now, clung to his apprehension for the Mediterranean, so Collingwood had not got rid of his preoccupation with the Channel. It would be unsafe, therefore, to argue that because in the main he was right in this case and Nelson wrong, that his strategical penetration was greater than Nelson's. The view he now laid before his chief was that Villeneuve's object was to bring out the Ferrol and Rochefort squadrons, and so appear off Ushant with thirty-four of the line, and there be joined by twenty more from Brest. Cornwallis by concentrating the three divisions of the Western Squadron would not have more than thirty. "This," he says, "appears to be a probable plan. For unless it is to bring these great fleets and armies to some point of service—some rash attempt at conquest—they have been only subjecting them to chance of loss, which I do not believe the Corsican would do, without the hope of adequate reward."[1]

Nelson, however, still clung to his waning hope. His intention was, as he informed the Admiralty, to proceed to

[1] Collingwood to Nelson, off Cadiz, June 18th: *Nelson Papers, Add. MSS.* 34930. Printed in Nicolas, vi. 472.

Tetuan for fresh victuals and water. In the meantime, he said, he was sending to Collingwood and Bickerton for the orders they had received in his absence, and if he found them to contain nothing to the contrary, he would then, after providing for the blockade of Cartagena, take station outside the Mediterranean and wait for further instructions. If, however, he heard Villeneuve had made for the Bay, he would forthwith join the Ferrol or the Ushant squadron, as circumstances seemed to require.[1]

The interval he employed in restoring the situation in the Mediterranean. He could not understand the existing disposition, with Collingwood's fleet divided between Cadiz and Cartagena, and nothing at all with Knight at Gibraltar to control the Straits. But above all he was concerned for Craig at Malta. He found orders recalling the sloops from that station to join Collingwood. So active were the enemy's privateers, and so incapable the island of feeding itself unless the adjacent waters were free, that he knew this would mean the starvation of the garrison. His first letter to Barham, on hearing of his appointment as First Lord, was to protest against the arrangement. He even took upon himself to cancel it and order the cruisers back again. Nor did he stop here. He reorganised the whole command into three sections, and sent home a requisition for the force required for each. Collingwood was to command from St. Vincent as far as Cape Spartel on the Moorish coast for the blockade of Cadiz and Seville. Knight was to have the Straits or Gibraltar section extending from Spartel to Malaga with a substantial cruiser squadron under his flag. Bickerton, whom he sent for in person, was to have the rest, with explicit directions as to how he was to dispose his force for the blockade of Cartagena, the defence of Sardinia, Sicily, Naples, and Malta, and the protection of the Levant trade. These arrangements were

[1] To Marsden, Gibraltar, July 20th: Nicolas, vi. 473.

completed on July 22nd, and then Nelson moved out for Tetuan, little dreaming that to the northward off Finisterre another was enjoying the feast he had prepared so laboriously for himself.

On the 24th, still hungering for news—for not yet had he received one material word—he weighed for the rendezvous he had given off Cape Spartel, where all his cruisers were to meet him. He had got no further than Tarifa, just outside the Gut, when at about half-past three in the morning of the 25th, the *Termagant*, a sloop recently out from England, came into the fleet. She had been into the Tagus on her way down, and had brought on a Lisbon newspaper containing an account of the arrival of the *Curieux*, and the news she carried. Nelson's mind was made up in a moment. Clearly Villeneuve had been making for the Bay, and thither he would go. A strong Levanter was blowing, making it difficult to speak with his old friend Collingwood. Important as an interview was, he would not waste a breath of the fair wind. Word was left for cruisers to join him at St. Vincent, or if he were not there, at Ferrol—unless there was reason to believe he had taken a different course. In that case they were to look for him at Ushant or Ireland, or in the last resort Spithead. So it was that just as Calder was moving to the distant rendezvous off Finisterre in hopes of meeting him, Nelson was making in all haste to join hands with him.[1] On the second day he was off St. Vincent, but here he encountered the prevailing northerly winds. To proceed up the coast to Ferrol would mean interminable delays, and would involve the risk of leaving the Ushant squadron unsupported at the critical moment. In his hands, and his hands alone, lay the possibility of redressing the balance which

[1] This was not the regular rendezvous No. 52: "North-west of Finisterre, six leagues," but probably that mentioned by James: "38 leagues north-west." The latter position was roughly in the latitude of Cape Ortegal, and about 100 miles to the westward of Ferrol.

Collingwood had calculated so anxiously. There was nothing for it but to reach wide to the westward, and he sent word to Cornwallis that he was coming to him, or to Ireland, as intelligence might dictate.

It was an unhappy decision, for which nobody can be blamed. Had Calder but sent word to the southward immediately after the action it might have been avoided, but he had no cruiser to spare. Had he but sunk his two worthless old prizes it might have been done. As it was, in default of information, Nelson had to assume his enemy had gone to the north, and was forced to make for the point of greatest danger. Had he but joined Calder what a world of acute anxiety would have been spared! what successes would have lain in his path! Trafalgar might never have been fought, and Barham's great idea might have been fully realised.

Ahead of him was a strategical tangle into which he must have torn with resounding advantage. From the Finisterre rendezvous Calder had sent the *Dragon*, his untouched seventy-four, to look into Ferrol. She returned with the surprising information that everything there was just as they had left it. Gourdon and Grandallana were still at their moorings, and neither Villeneuve nor the Rochefort squadron had appeared. Calder could only conclude that Villeneuve had made for Cadiz, and was destined to fall into the hands of Nelson and Collingwood. With a quiet mind he accordingly decided to resume his blockade. His original intention had been to leave the *Dragon* behind him in case Nelson might still be coming north, but as there was now little likelihood of this, he took her with him and left the rendezvous bare. By July 29th he had reconstituted the blockade with fourteen of the line, but two days later he decided to send home his 80-gun ship, the *Malta*, to repair her damages.

Meanwhile Villeneuve found himself at Vigo in what

he called "a most distressing situation." He had neither orders nor intelligence; the port was without defence or any means of repairing his ships; scurvy and dysentery were playing havoc with his crews, and besides the two ships he had lost, three others, as the result of the action, were unfit for service. In this plight he had summoned Gourdon to come to him, but Gourdon could only reply it was impossible. He had not yet been able to get out to Coruña. There was nothing for it then but for Villeneuve to try to get to him at the risk of another action. "May a new meeting," he said, "be more fortunate than the first." By hook or by crook he scraped together a month's water and victuals for the fifteen vessels which now constituted his squadron, and on the last day of July, leaving his sick and wounded behind with the three disabled vessels, he put to sea intent on reaching Ferrol without an action. Outside on the morrow, August 1st, he was fortunate enough to find a strong south-westerly breeze, and with all speed he stole away northward, close along the shore.

And where was Allemand? Why had he not made Ferrol? Three days after Stirling had disappeared from Rochefort he had put to sea, with his broad pennant in the *Majestueux* 120. His squadron besides comprised four two-deckers and five cruisers—an ideal force for the work he had in hand. It must be recalled that the last orders which had reached him were to make a demonstration off the West Coast of Ireland, and be back at a certain rendezvous 40 leagues west of Ferrol in time to meet the combined squadron on its return from the West Indies. His main object, in fact, as laid down by Napoleon, was to bring about the long-sought junction with Villeneuve. It was characteristic of Napoleon's inexplicable elimination of the enemy from his naval dispositions, that the rendezvous he fixed for the meeting was well within the area

which Calder had been directed to cover.[1] Indeed, it was just 40 miles south-east of the point where the battle of July 22nd was actually fought, and the Emperor's naïve surprise when he realised it we shall see presently. The time fixed was the end of the month. Allemand was to be on the spot from July 29th to August 3rd, but here was another miscalculation. The order assumed that Villeneuve would not start home till thirty-five days after Magon arrived. A possible interference by Nelson had been ignored, and now Nelson's hot pursuit outwards had had the effect of driving Villeneuve home, not only too soon to meet Allemand, but too soon to receive the despatch which explained the new arrangement for his junction with the Rochefort squadron.

To make matters still more confused, the effect of Stirling's blockade had been seriously to delay Allemand's sailing under his original instructions, and the consequence was that when he did get away and opened his sealed orders, he found the time limited for his Irish demonstration had already expired. It was for this reason that Napoleon had sent down an order to stop him. It arrived too late, and Allemand put to sea with the old instructions. They directed him to proceed west 400 leagues, so as to avoid the British squadrons off Ushant and Ferrol, and appear off Ireland from the westward between July 4th and 9th. There he was to cruise for a week, and then run down to the Finisterre rendezvous to meet Villeneuve. If, therefore, he followed his orders strictly he should have begun to make for the rendezvous the day he left Rochefort. But it was characteristic of the man's high spirit not to look too closely at the letter of his orders, but to try to do his best to carry out their intention. He determined, therefore, not to give up the Irish diversion without an effort. "Although

[1] This rendezvous was also about 30 miles south by west of our own distant Finisterre rendezvous, i.e. 38 leagues north-west of Finisterre.

the term had expired," he wrote to Decrès, "I thought, my lord, that without missing my first rendezvous, 40 leagues from Ferrol, I could, with favourable winds and by cutting short my route, still show myself off Ireland."[1]

With this idea he held away due west, as directed, all unconscious that, instead of avoiding the Ushant squadron, his course was taking him straight to the southernmost point which Cornwallis had made in his sweep for Villeneuve. But while he was preparing to weigh, Cornwallis, as we know, had turned back, and when Allemand on July 19th reached the fatal point, he found nothing there but the *Ranger* sloop which Cornwallis had left behind him to try to get wind of the Combined Squadron from neutral merchantmen. She was promptly captured and sunk. An examination of her officers disclosed her mission, and put Allemand on his guard, and next day he issued a ruthless order that every neutral that had been in sight of the squadron while on its true course was to be captured and sunk.[2]

On the following day, the 21st, he found himself nearly 150 leagues west of Rochefort. The wind was drawing into the west-north-west; it was foul for him to go on; and as yet he had not traversed half the distance to the westward which had been laid down in his instructions. But it was fair for Ireland. At the risk of falling foul of Cornwallis, he could shorten his route, as he said, and make up for the time lost at Rochefort. This he resolved to do, and hauled up to the northward. But it was all to little purpose. The wind kept veering continually further to the north, and though for three days he struggled on he could make little progress. True, he captured a fine vessel from Guernsey, from which he got a set of large scale charts of the Irish coast, but by the 23rd he saw his attempt was hopeless.

[1] August 14th: Desbrière, iv. 759.

[2] Rapport du capitaine Allemand, July 20th: Desbrière, iv. 759. Between this date and August 16th, when he reached Vigo, he saw 91 sail. Of these he sunk 3 English, and no less than 22 neutrals.—*Ibid.*, p. 785.

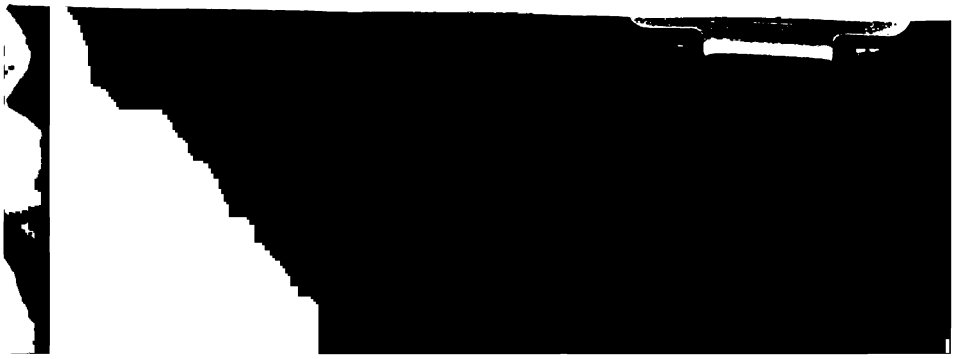
While still over 300 miles from his goal, he had to heave-to in a stormy northerly wind; all chance of reaching Ireland in the time available was gone, and next day he bore up for his Finisterre rendezvous.[1]

In all naval story there is probably no adventure so full of fantastic fortune as this incredible cruise of Allemand's. Pursuing a plan that was crossed at every point by Barham's finished disposition, he sped from danger to danger as his master's wilful blindness had doomed him. Wandering in the midst of well-disposed squadrons hungering for his destruction, again and again he escaped by a hairbreadth—appearing and disappearing like a phantom fleet—his every move forestalled, yet always sheltered by some bewildering turn of fortune or happy stroke of judgment. When we consider that the whole episode was born of that little interlineation in Barham's order, whereby he altered his mind at the last moment and sent Stirling to Calder, its mythical colour is complete. It is as though some unseen power were resolved to remind the veteran First Lord how helpless was his art against the Fortune of War.

As Allemand had begun, so he continued to the end. His cruise had opened by his making straight for the spot where Cornwallis had been waiting for him, and having escaped by mere chance, he was running blindly into Calder's arms. But his star was still bright. He reached the point of danger on July 28th, a day before he was due, and it was also the very day Calder had moved away to resume the blockade of Ferrol and had left the rendezvous bare.

Here then he remained unseen his allotted time, sending out cruising ships to look for Villeneuve. On August 3rd one of them rejoined. Of Villeneuve there was no trace, but she had ascertained from an American, homeward bound from Bordeaux, that on the last day of July Ferrol was blockaded by a squadron of fourteen of the line.

[1] Rapport d'Allemand: Desbrière, iv. 759.



Thereupon, in accordance with his instructions, Allemand moved to a second rendezvous which had been given him, about 160 miles south-west of Ushant and just outside the Ushant-Finisterre line—in fact just about the limit of Cornwallis's advanced cruisers.[1] At the hour of starting he found he was being watched by a frigate—she was the *Æolus*, of which more presently—but after his manner he sailed a false course east-south-east till he saw her disappear towards Ferrol, and then he was able to proceed northward undetected.[2] As he reached his point on August 6th, another of his cruisers came in to report that, from information obtained from a Swede, she had definitely located a squadron of eleven of the line with three three-deckers cruising about 60 miles north of Cape Ortegal. As we shall see this was also Calder, but Allemand could not tell what to make of it. He could only conclude it was another squadron in search of him, and that he must have passed close to it in the night. He naturally became anxious. His orders were to remain where he was for a week. The idea apparently was that at this point he would be able to fall in with Villeneuve after he had released the Ferrol squadron, and would be coming north for Ushant. But Napoleon, in his extraordinary infatuation, had omitted to consider that this would be exactly the area which his enemy would be watching most closely, and so it was. Allemand immediately found himself observed by a little cloud of cruisers, peeping at him over the horizon or pushing their attentions home. In vain he tried to get hold of them; every one slipped nimbly through his fingers.[3] All he could come by were one or two merchant-

[1] Instructions pour le commandant de l'escadre de Rochefort, June 9th: Desbrière, iv. 606. The second rendezvous was 46° 55′ N., 7° 8′ W.; and see *Ibid.*, p. 765, and chart, *ante*, p. 184.

[2] Rapport de la *Gloire* and Rapport d'Allemand: Desbrière iv. 763–5.

[3] For the narrow escape of the *Naiad*, see Captain Dundas to Cornwallis: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 332; and Rapport du Capitaine de l'*Armide*: Desbrière, iv. 766. The *Naiad* had been detached by Cornwallis to the southward and

men and a British privateer cutter just from home. But this last capture only added to his trouble, for he learnt from her that as she was sailing from Plymouth two Spanish prizes had been brought into the Sound. Evidently an action had been fought, but was it with Villeneuve or with the Ferrol squadron? Two days later further information was obtained from a Portuguese prize. She had been boarded a few days before by the *Dragon*, and her skipper could confirm the action. It was Calder who had fought it, against whom he knew not, but he was sure the squadron of eleven of the line that had been seen to the north of Cape Ortegal was the same which had fought the action. What then was it that was blockading Ferrol? To make the position still more difficult, the Portuguese skipper had also to tell that he had been boarded by the *Phœnix* (a frigate of which we shall hear more). She appeared to be looking for Calder, and had told him that Villeneuve had been sighted by the *Curieux* flying homewards with Nelson at his heels.[1]

It was more than the harassed Commodore could endure. There were still thirty hours to run of the time he was to remain on the northern rendezvous, but he decided it was madness to remain to the end. "My position in the Bay," he wrote in his report, "has become disturbing, my lord. The squadron blockading Brest must know my position by the frigate which escaped the *Armide* [*i.e.* the *Naiad*]. The squadron blockading Ferrol and the one which is cruising in latitude 45° and longitude 11° [that is, to the north of Cape Ortegal] are also informed of it by the frigates which have watched me. My station is too plainly disclosed for it to be prudent for me to remain

westward to endeavour to obtain information of the Combined Squadron on August 6th: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 331.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 766. The *Phœnix* had been sent down by Cornwallis shortly after he returned off Brest to communicate with Calder, according to Barham's general order to keep up communication with Ferrol.

till the 13th. It is almost impossible, my lord, for a vessel from Villeneuve to reach me. It will be captured by the quantity of enemy's ships which are cruising in every part of the Bay." He accordingly concluded by saying he intended to avail himself of the discretion which his instructions allowed him, and run for safety to Vigo. And this he did there and then, stretching far to the westward to get out of harm's way.

Except in one important point the actual situation differed little from his appreciation. On August 1st, the day after Calder had returned to the blockade of Ferrol, and Villeneuve had left Vigo for the same port, the strong south-westerly wind which was carrying the Combined Squadron so happily to its destination, forced the British Admiral well to leeward of the blockaded port. The result was that Villeneuve found nothing in his way, and was able to run into Coruña without firing a shot. On the following day, in accordance with Barham's instructions that at the end of the specified period all squadrons were to return to their regular stations, Calder ordered Stirling to return to Rochefort. If he found the port empty he was to join Cornwallis. Calder himself with his remaining nine ships took the position from 40 to 60 miles to the northward of the port in which the mysterious squadron had been reported to Allemand. Here he continued day after day laboriously holding up against strong south-westerly winds. His reason is nowhere stated; it was not his usual practice. In such weather his rule was to run for shelter behind Cape Ortegal.[1] It is to be presumed, therefore, that he was looking out for Allemand. Not that he had any definite information, for the *Æolus*, who had just located the Rochefort squadron, had not yet reached him. But seeing how anxious he had been about it after the battle, it is natural he was expecting it would make an attempt to reach

[1] See his *General Instructions: Blockade of Brest*, ii. 197.

Ferrol. He was therefore lying in Allemand's path, and according to the sound British method was keeping wide of the port of destination in order to deal with him before his friends inside could come to his aid.

Had he been at the Emperor's elbow he could not have judged more correctly. A direct movement on Ferrol, if Stirling raised the blockade of Rochefort, was actually what Napoleon had enjoined on Allemand in the orders which did not reach him. But Calder was doomed to disappointment. His move, as we have seen, had come to Allemand's ears and had effectually headed him off, and after cruising in vain for a week—that is, till the 9th—Calder sent the *Dragon* to look into Ferrol to see if by chance the Rochefort squadron had slipped in. The same evening she returned in company with the *Æolus*, bearing news that Allemand was at sea to the westward, and that not he but the whole Combined Fleet was in Ferrol. To remain with his slender squadron facing a force of thirty of the line obviously about to sail, to say nothing of Allemand's five, was in Calder's eyes useless; and, as Orde had done earlier in the campaign, he decided it was his duty to close on Ushant. On the 10th, therefore, he stood north, leaving the *Dragon* behind to watch the port and move towards the Finisterre rendezvous to look out for Nelson. Thus for a third time Allemand had the narrowest possible escape, and his prudence in leaving the rendezvous before his allotted time was justified. By his orders he should have held it till the 13th, and on that day Calder on his way north passed by it only twenty-four hours after Allemand had left, and nothing but his sagacious disobedience saved him from destruction.

So far as Napoleon's plan was concerned the Rochefort squadron was, of course, still in the air. Otherwise to all appearance, by the junction of the other French squadrons at Coruña, the combination had been so far successful. Still

the Admirals knew it was only an appearance. On August 2nd as the Combined Squadron were making the junction at Coruña, the Emperor was at last on his way from Paris to Boulogne. On the 3rd, he began issuing his final orders from the camp of the Grand Army, and on that day Gravina and Villeneuve were writing to Decrès under honeyed phrases a solemn warning that the Emperor's plan was impracticable. "I will say to your Excellency," wrote Gravina, "that the plan of operations could not seem better conceived—it was divine. . . . But to-day it is sixty days since we left Martinique, and the English have had plenty of time to send warning in advance to Europe and to reinforce their Ferrol squadron. . . . All this, in my opinion, has much disconcerted the plan, brilliant and well laid as it was. Now the enemy knows our force. . . . It is only natural that on our leaving here they will not hesitate to give us battle, and by sending forward their scouts to warn their Brest squadron they will be able to shadow us and choose their time for a second battle before we can make our Brest landfall. In this way they can defeat the plan of campaign, which certainly was very fine and interesting." From first to last the French frankly recognised Gravina's loyalty and courage, and coming from his devoted pen such criticism, for all its courteous phrasing, was in the last degree scathing.[1]

Villeneuve, ill and depressed, was entirely of the same opinion, and besides endorsing Gravina's strategical views, he gave Decrès frankly his real estimate of his late "victory." It had, in fact, shattered the last remnants of his confidence in the plan and his squadron. "The enemy," he said, "were warned; they had been reinforced; they did not hesitate to come and attack us with a force numerically very inferior. . . . In the fog our captains, without experience of an action or of fleet tactics, had no better idea than

[1] Desbrière, iv. 775, August 8th.

to follow their second ahead, and here we are the laughing-stock of Europe."[1] To complete his despair, he had received, as he was entering Coruña bay, one of Napoleon's impatient orders, forbidding him peremptorily to put into Ferrol. He was to anchor at Coruña, and wait there for Gourdon and Grandallana to come down and join him. The result was that Gravina, who was leading, found himself too far in to obey the signal, and was forced to go on, while Villeneuve had hurriedly to anchor at Coruña with half his ships running aboard each other in the confined anchorage. At Coruña there were no stores or water to be had, everything was eight miles away up at Ferrol in the depth of the bay; and there, to complete the trouble, Gourdon, the Commander-in-chief, lay to all appearance dying, and Grandallana was intriguing to get Gravina's command. Moreover, as the squadrons lay scattered between the two ports, it was impossible to get them out in one body, and Calder the day before had been reported in the offing. Villeneuve professed himself ready to go out the moment his fleet was revictualled, but it was without hope of avoiding or winning an action. "Eight of the line," he wrote, "keep in sight of the coast at eight leagues. They will profit by the lesson given to Admiral Orde; they will shadow us. I shall not be able to close with them, and they will fall back on the squadron before Brest, or that before Cadiz, according as I make for the one port or the other."

The news that Allemand was out and under orders to join him did nothing to relieve, what he called, "the bitterness of his soul." He had been told of the commodore's two rendezvous, but knowing, as every seaman must know, how ill chosen they were, he despaired of finding him at either, and Decrès, lost in the confusion of the Emperor's orders, had forgotten to tell him that Allemand's point of retreat was Vigo. As the period for Allemand's holding

[1] Desbrière, iv. 776, August 6th.

the Finisterre rendezvous had just expired, the only chance of getting into touch with him was to send to the northern one, on the fringe of Cornwallis's station. One frigate was all Villeneuve would risk on the enterprise, and on August 6th, just as Allemand reached the rendezvous, Captain Milius, of the *Didon* 40, went out with orders that the squadron was to come to Ferrol, and if Villeneuve were gone it was to follow the further instructions that would be found awaiting it.[1]

A famous cruiser episode of the highest interest was the result. On July 20th, in response to Calder's urgent entreaty for more cruisers, and Barham's instructions to keep up communications, Cornwallis had sent down the *Niobe* 38. On the 29th, immediately after he received news of the action, he despatched another, the *Æolus* 32, Captain Lord William Fitzroy, and, later still, the *Phœnix* 36. They were to look for him on his Finisterre rendezvous. The *Æolus* was also charged with a despatch, which probably contained Cornwallis's rendezvous, as he was expecting Calder would shortly come north, and Fitzroy had further orders to look out for enemy's squadrons in the Bay as he crossed it. If he located one, he was immediately to push on before it to report to the admiral for whose station it appeared to be making.[2] This was the vessel which, as we have seen, had sighted Allemand on August 4th just as he was about to leave his first rendezvous; and on the 5th, having seen him steer his false course east-south-east, had gone off to warn Calder. On his way down to the rendezvous Fitzroy ascertained from the communicative American, by whom Allemand had obtained the same information, that Calder had resumed his blockade, and he accordingly altered his course for Ferrol. The result was that, on the afternoon of

[1] Desbrière, iv. 729, *note* 1.

[2] Cornwallis to Marsden, July 29th: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 328, and *Log of the Phœnix*. Fitzroy's orders are printed by James, vol. iv. p. 451–2, *Appendices* 1 and 2.

August 7th, about 60 miles north-west of Finisterre, he sighted the *Didon*, who, after ascertaining that he was not one of Allemand's cruisers, turned and ran from him off her course south-west. Fitzroy gave chase till dark, and seeing it was impossible to close without a long pursuit, decided that in view of the importance of the intelligence he bore, and the clear tenor of his orders, it was his duty to haul off and continue his mission to find Calder. And this, as we have seen, he did.[1]

Meanwhile the *Didon*, having run far to the south-west, and finding herself no longer observed, determined to make another effort to get north to Allemand's rendezvous. Hauling her wind again to the north-west, she headed almost straight for Calder's Finisterre rendezvous, and sure enough at daybreak on the 10th she sighted a strange cruiser in the distance that at once gave chase. Now it so happened that Milius, like every one else, had just boarded the American from Bordeaux, who by this time must have been entering into the humour of his position with thorough enjoyment. He informed Milius that the stranger was certainly the British cruiser *Phœnix*, on board of whom he had been summoned the previous day. She had only twenty guns, he said, but her captain and officers had so

[1] The report of Captain Milius put the incident on the 8th. James, from the Log of the *Æolus*, puts it on the 7th, in latitude 43° 41′, longitude 10° 11′; that is, considerably to the southward of the point shown in Colonel Desbrière's chart: *Projets et Tentatives*, v. 731. Fitzroy's conduct led to a violent controversy. James, for whom strategical questions had no interest, in his first edition practically accused him of cowardice. Fitzroy answered him in a not too judicious pamphlet. Brenton, in his *Naval History*, supported Fitzroy, and James, in his second edition, returned to the charge at great length and with even greater intemperance. Fitzroy was a tyrannical and unpopular officer, but he does not appear to have been blamed on this occasion by his superiors. Modern naval opinion would now probably be unanimous in confirming the correctness of the behaviour of both Milius and Fitzroy, on the ground that both were charged with definite intelligence duty vital to the campaign. In contrast with Fitzroy's behaviour, James praises the *Niobe's*, who, having no special information, chased a strange sail for three days and three nights with the result that she never found Calder at all; and yet he blames Milius for engaging the *Phœnix* later. For the whole controversy see James (ed. 1902), iv. pp. 54–65.

high a conceit of her and themselves that they would certainly fight. But in fact the Yankee was lying. There was sport in hand, and he would not spoil it. It was true he had been on board the *Phœnix*, as he said, but having asked to be shown round the ship, he found her commander, Captain Baker, had disguised her to look like a sloop. In fact, she was a frigate of thirty-six guns. But Baker had bought some cases of claret from him, probably at his own price, and having been otherwise handsomely treated he went back to his ship in high good humour, determined to play the English captain's game.

The result was all that Baker could wish. The *Didon* had now only three days to reach Allemand's rendezvous before he would be gone, and Milius, believing he had nothing but a weak enemy in his path, determined to fight his way through. His decision will probably be applauded as correct and seamanlike. His case differed essentially from that of the *Æolus*. He had definite material intelligence to convey to a definite spot, and, unlike the *Æolus*, he could not get it through in time without clearing an inferior enemy's cruiser out of his way. To run was to fail in his mission, to fight was to secure a chance of success. He chose to fight, and a very famous cruiser action was the result.

Both the commanders and both the frigates had the reputation of being amongst the smartest in the service. The *Didon* in size, force, crew, and speed was decidedly superior.[1] Baker, however, was confident, and being deter-

[1] James, who gives a minute account of the action (iv. p. 70), furnishes the following comparative table:—

	Broadside.	*Crew.*	*Tons.*
Phœnix . . .	21 guns, 444 lbs.	245	844
Didon . . .	23 ,, 563 ,,	330	1091

The *Phœnix* affords a typical example of the advantage of the carronade armament. Baker had had her re-armed on the new system with 26 short 18-pounders, 4 9-pounders, and 12 32-pounder carronades. The effect was almost to double her weight of metal. Originally her broadside was only 265 lbs.

mined not to let her escape him, manœuvred to get to leeward before he would fire a shot. In the process, so brilliantly was the *Didon* handled, he was raked three or four times without being able to effect his purpose. So severely mauled was his rigging that further manœuvring was impossible, and in desperation he ran straight at his opponent. Then at last the two vessels were fairly engaged side by side at pistol shot. Carronades, grape, musketry—everything got home at its best. A fresh attempt to rake which the *Didon* made, and which Baker cleverly parried, brought them yard-arm to yard-arm, the stem of the *Didon* almost foul of the starboard quarter of the *Phœnix*. Both men promptly tried to board, but so superior was the French strength that it was all Baker could do to keep his own decks free. For a while it was a rough affair of pikes and muskets, till Baker got a gun to bear out of his cabin window with terrible effect. Still the action raged almost muzzle to muzzle till both vessels were no longer under control, and they fell away from each other breathless to repair damages.

It had become calm with a big swell, and each commander was eager to be the first ready to catch a return of the breeze. Here the *Phœnix* had the advantage. Though her rigging and sails were in rags, her spars had suffered the least. The *Didon*, it is true, had lost nothing but her maintopmast, but so badly was her foremast wounded that before it could be secured she rolled it overboard. The *Phœnix*, on the other hand, was already nearly under control again. All essential knotting and splicing were complete as the breeze came back. In a few minutes her tattered sails began to draw, and she was bearing down again to renew the action. The *Didon* had already lost over seventy killed and wounded; she was absolutely helpless; and Milius ended a gallant and well-managed action by hauling down his flag.[1]

[1] For further details see James, iv. 65 *et seq.*, and Captain Baker to Cornwallis: *Blockade of Brest*, ii. 338.

Baker had won, but his position was by no means easy. Nearly all his officers were wounded; he had less than 200 men to manage some 350 unwounded prisoners, and a dismasted prize, 200 tons bigger than himself, to get into safety. Taking her in tow, he made away to join Calder off Ferrol, but ere he reached his destination he fell in with the *Dragon* making for the Finisterre rendezvous to try to fall in with Nelson, with intelligence that the blockade was raised and Allemand at sea. Her news was such as made it madness to try to get north, and under her escort Baker turned back to get out of harm's way.

For the supreme hour had come: everything was in movement for the final cast, and it was Baker who, by his fine action, had ensured that at the crisis of the campaign, in spite of Napoleon's exhaustive ingenuity, the Rochefort squadron should remain as it had begun, lost and in the air—in touch with no one, and unable in any way to affect the issue.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME